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John Strong's Secret.

By MRS. EMMA D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH.

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Author of "The Hidden Hand," "Self-Made," "Retribution," "Left Alone," "Winning Her Way," "The Malediction," Etc.

CHAPTER I

MERRY MARRIAGE BELLS

"I see a bride all crowned with flowers and smiling
As in delighted visions on the brink
Of a great chasm." —Anon.

"A fearful sign stands in her house of life,
An enemy—a fiend lurks close behind
The radiance of her planet."
—Schiller (Coleridge trans.).

It seemed such a happy marriage—the old folks as delighted as the young—the exception, which proved that rule about the "course of true love," for theirs ran as "smooth" as a river of the Elysian Fields.

His name was John Strong, and he was the only son of a wealthy importer in the "Monumental City," as Baltimore is called. His father had lately taken him into partnership, and by this transfusion of young blood into the old body had given it a fresh impetus towards enterprise and prosperity, so that in commercial circles it was said that in the firm of "Strong & Son," son was the life of the business. Nature and fortune had equally lavished their gifts upon him. He was a tall, handsome, and vigorous blonde, with a highly intellectual and purely moral nature. He had won prizes in all the athletic contests in which he had engaged, and had graduated with the highest honors from his university. His ambition would have led him to the study of law and to a career of politics, but he yielded to the wish of his father that the only son of the house should enter into and perpetuate the business.

After the father had taken the son for business partner, his next wish was that the son should take a domestic one.

"You should marry early, John; not put it off as late as I did, who was forty-eight before I wed the woman who had been waiting for me for twelve long years. But then I had my fortune to make, and her father was obdurate and she obedient. 'Better be an old maid, Sally, than a poor man's wife,' he said. But your fortune is ready made for you, John, thank heaven! And you are twenty-three years old, a good age for marrying. I am seventy-two and cannot have much longer to live. Would like to see a grandson before I die to carry on the old concern. So look about you, Johnnie! Look about you, boy! And be sure I shall not object to any one you may choose, lad!" the old man said—not once, but almost daily, in these, or words to the same effect.

But John seemed absolutely indifferent to the society of women. He liked books better. Nearly all his time not given to business was devoted to study. His taste for that was omnifarious. Art, science, literature—all had equal attractions. So, to many invitations to balls, dinners, musicals, etc., which were lavished upon the handsome, wealthy, and popular young man, he returned more "regrets" than acceptances. His only recreation was the theatre, in which he preferred the legitimate drama and operas. His taste for these was hereditary—his father enjoying such entertainments now in his age quite as much as he had done in his youth. Father and son were in perfect sympathy here, and always went together and seemed to derive more pleasure from seeing an artistic performance in company with one another. This looked as if John had really made up his mind to be an old bachelor.

"But then he is young and he may change his mind," thought the old man. "There

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would be no call to hurry, John," he often sighed, pathetically, "only you know I am past the Bible limit to man's life, and I do want to see my grandson before I die."

John would probably have gratified his father in this matter, as he had done in that of giving up law for trade, only there seemed to him something repulsive in the idea of "looking out for a wife," and marrying in cold blood, so to speak.

But John's time came!

One winter night the father and son went to the theatre together to hear the opera of Norma. They occupied seats in the orchestra to the right of the stage. While the overture was still being played, the old gentleman, opera glass in hand, was letting his gaze wander over the packed house to look for friends or acquaintances; the young man was gazing with such rapt absorption into the box on the left of the stage that he seemed lost to all else about him.

At length Mr. Strong turned to his son and said:

"Everybody here to-night, John!"

The young man did not answer—did not even seem to hear.

"Haven't seen such a packed house since Jenny Lind's day," continued the old gentleman.

The young one did not open his lips or turn his head in reply. His whole soul was pouring through his eyes into the opposite box.

"John!"

He started and turned his head.

"I say, John, that I have not seen such a house since the Swedish Nightingale sang our souls to heaven!"

"Father!" said the son, utterly ignoring his remark, which he had probably not heard, "can you tell me who are the occupants of the box opposite us?"

"Let me see," said he, raising his glass. "Oh, yes, to be sure. They are the Beverlys. Didn't know they'd got home."

"You know them, then!" so eagerly exclaimed the young man that the elder lowered his glass and looked at him.

"To be sure I do! They came from Richmond and settled here about two years ago, while you were going through your last course at college. They have been traveling in Europe for the last year, however."

"They are father, mother, and daughter?" suggested the son.

"Oh, no! mother, daughter and uncle. The old gentleman, Major Beverly, a retired army officer, is brother-in-law to the elder lady, who is a widow," explained the father.

"Father, do you know them well enough to introduce me?" inquired the young man in a low tone, from which he could not banish his anxiety.

"Why, to be sure I do!" said Mr. Strong, staring at the eager questioner. "But there, the curtain is up! When this act is over I will take you around and present you to the party." And then he turned and gave his whole attention to the stage.

But John had eyes for nothing but the Beverly box, whose central attraction was a beautiful little brunette with a petite, perfectly modeled form, a rich, olive complexion warmed into glowing crimson on cheeks and lips and lighted by a pair of great dark eyes, full of fire and tenderness, and shaded with a thicket of soft, shining black curls. The little beauty's whole attention was given to the music, so she did not perceive, and therefore could not be embarrassed by the entranced devotion of the young worshipper, which must have seemed impertinent had it not been involuntary.

When the act ended and the drop fell, amid a tempest of enthusiasm; when the diva had been called before the curtain to be smothered with a shower of bouquets, and deafened by thunders of applause, and had curtsied and retired; John ventured to remind his father of his promise.

"To be sure! We'll go around. I have never seen the young lady, you know. She's been at school in Germany. Part of their business over there was to bring her home. I fancy they made a grand tour on her account—after taking her from school, you know. Come!"

They left their seats and made the half circuit of the auditorium to reach the Beverly box. Mr. Strong entered it and greeted the elder lady with the stately courtesy of the old school, repeated the ceremony with the younger one, and then cordially shook hands with the old soldier. Finally he presented his son. The Beverlys received them politely, and invited them to take seats in their box. They accepted the courtesy, each with a bow, and one with a flush of pleasure. There were two vacant seats. The father took one. The other happened to be next Miss Beverly.

"How kind of my father to leave this for me," thought John, as he seated himself, feeling as if he had now begun to live. Never had he dreamed that earth could hold so much happiness as he found in the presence of this beautiful girl. And yet, for the first time in his life and to his own surprise, he felt beside her as bashful as a country bumpkin. It was the young lady who, in her childlike simplicity, knew no bashfulness, and made conversation entertain the guest of her mother's box, speaking of the music, prima donna, the costumes, etc. As for the young man, enthusiast as he was in operatic music, he could have

sworn that her voice was the sweetest sound that he had ever heard in his life. Therefore, as well as from the unprecedented and incomprehensible timidity that so strangely came over him in her presence, he spoke little, but listened deferentially, luxuriating in the melody of her tones as in the beauty of her person. All too soon the curtain rose on the second act, and politeness demanded that attention should be given exclusively to the performance on the stage. For the first time in his experience, John Strong felt indifferent to the opera. But he was pleased to know that everyone else's attention was riveted to the scene, so that he might look without offence or notice on the beautiful face and form beside him. When the curtain fell upon the final act, and the diva had been invoked and worshipped in the usual form, the audience began to rise and disperse. The Beverlys lingered in their box until the way was clear for their exit, or not too damaging to dress or temper. While they lingered they discussed the diva, the opera and its composer. At last they got out and reached their carriages. Young Strong deferentially handed Mrs. and Miss Beverly into theirs, and modestly requested and received permission to call upon them the next day. Then he bowed reverentially over the hand of the younger lady and retired.

"Pretty girl, that," said old Mr. Strong, as the father and son drove home together.

"Divinely beautiful!" fervently aspirated the son.

"Humph!" grunted the father.

"A dream of heaven!" murmured the son.

"She hasn't got a rap, my boy!"

"Sir?"

"But we don't care about that, do we?"

"About"—

"Her not having money! We've got enough for both!"

"Oh, sir!"

"'Oh, sir!' Yes, sir! I saw how you are taken! Love at first sight and all that! In love for the first time in your life, I do believe! Glad of it! Go in and win, lad! Go in and win!"

"If I might hope!" sighed the smitten youth.

"Might hope? May be certain, my boy; but they are poor!"

"They had a very handsome carriage."

"From a livery stable. The old major hired it. He does things handsomely for them. Not very well off himself. Only his half pay and some trifling private property; but he's an old bachelor with no one to care for but these two gentlewomen. Supports them both. Educated Eula at one of the best schools in Berlin."

"Eula?" inquired the young man, who of all this talk, heard only the name of his charmer.

"She was christened Eulalia, I believe, but I never heard her called anything but Eula by her kin."

"Eula!" murmured the young man, dreamily.

"Here we are at home," said Mr. Strong, as the carriage drew up to the door of one of the handsomest houses on one of the finest avenues in the city.

The next day John Strong called on the Beverlys at their hotel, and was received with flattering courtesy by the mother and with charming embarrassment by the daughter; for now the tables seemed to be turned, and it was the young girl who was conscious and confused, and the lovely blushes that heightened the beauty that had appeared perfection before, had the effect of setting the young gentleman quite at his ease. He felt that the attraction was mutual, and saw that it was not disallowed by the higher powers. He was in what he called the Seventh Heaven of Happiness, and what the worldly-wise-and-weary would have called the "Fool's Paradise." Theirs was a clear case of love at first sight. But, ah, heaven! it was not of their happy and prosperous love that I sat down to write! That love was soon openly declared and warmly approved. There was no reason why their marriage should be delayed. The Strongs, father and son, urged affairs so earnestly that a day was fixed for their marriage to take place within two months from their betrothal. Old Mr. Strong settled fifty thousand dollars on his daughter-in-law elect, saying gayly as he kissed her and handed her the documents:

"Now, my little lady, that is just what I would have done for my own daughter on her marriage, had heaven blessed me with one."

"And you, sir, take notice that I have made my daughter quite independent of you, so that unless you conduct yourself with propriety, she can send you about your business."

They were married in the early springtime, and immediately after a sumptuous wedding-breakfast, given in the Beverlys' parlor at their hotel, the young pair embarked on the steamer "Lancaster," bound for Europe for a three months' tour of the continent.

Old Mr. Strong employed his leisure time during their absence in building and furnishing for them a fine country house on the banks of the Patapsco, where they should spend their summers and autumns, occupy-

ing the town house only in winter and early spring.

CHAPTER II

MOUNT VISION

I see the cloud and the tempest near,
The voice of the troubled tide I hear.
—Anon.

THE young pair returned on the first of June, and took up their residence in their delightful home at Mount Vision.

Old Mr. Strong lived to welcome them there, and, for a few days, to witness their happiness; and then, one evening, he quietly passed away while dozing in his arm-chair. He died full of years and honors, and this, the inevitable end of the aged, was the only shadow upon the happiness of the young couple. A mere morning mist that the sunshine of their love and joy soon dispersed, so that the memory of their father even became a subject of veneration rather than of sorrow.

One pleasant evening, late in June, while they sat out on the front piazza of their villa, looking calmly over the moonlit river and its opposite banks of wooded hills, Eula suddenly shivered, smiled, and said:

"We are too happy, Jack. I fear—I fear"— She stopped and shivered again.

"What do you fear, dear little goose?" he jocosely inquired.

"I don't know what. Some spite of fate: something to bring us down to the level of suffering, sad humanity."

"Feeling that you are too happy shows that you are not happy enough to provoke fate, little goose!"

"There, that is twice you have called me 'little goose!' And I feel as if all my epidermis—is not that the scientific name for one's vulgar skin? Yes!—Well all my epidermis had turned to goose-flesh. Let us go in," she said, shivering and rising.

They entered the house, and Eula threw herself into an easy chair, but in a little while rose and tottered to a sofa, where she laid down, and in a few minutes more she was shaking with an ague.

"Malaria!" said John, distressed but not frightened, for malaria was so common; and he went out to dispatch a servant to the city to fetch their family physician, while Eula's faithful maid, Mandy, who had begun to nurse her, took her upstairs to bed, and with hot bricks and hot drinks and heavy blankets—all homely domestic remedies—sought to relieve her. As soon as he had sent off his servant on his errand, John hurried to his wife's room. He found her very ill, with shaking frame and chattering teeth.

"Better not speak to her, sir," said the nurse.

So John sat down by her bed and took her hand in silence. When the reaction came the fever was very high. John never left his place at her bedside, but sat holding her hand or bathing her head until the doctor arrived.

Dr. Speaks, when he saw his patient, looked very grave. No simple case of malaria was this.

In a few days the disease declared itself in all its terrors—malignant typhoid fever. John was almost mad with distress and anxiety. He never left her bedside except when he was obliged to do so. Her mother and uncle came from the city—the mother to help watch and nurse her beloved and only child, the uncle to be on hand day and night to make himself generally useful in any way he possibly could, if it were only by going errands for her at any hour, light or dark, and going faster than any other messenger could be induced to go. Two other physicians were called in consultation, and two trained nurses relieved each other day by day and night by night at her bedside. But neither doctor, nurse nor mother could equal the devotion of the young husband. He abandoned his business to his clerks and bookkeepers and confined himself not only to the house at Mount Vision, but to the sick-room and the adjoining sitting-room.

As the fever approached its crisis the agony of the young husband verged upon frenzy. He could not be induced to leave the sick chamber for more than a few minutes at a time. Then it would be to walk distractedly up and down the floor of the adjoining room, or to throw himself exhausted on the lounge. No one ever saw him sleep or eat. He grew pale, thin, feeble, hollow-eyed and tremulous.

"Whether the young wife lives or dies, if this goes on much longer he will die," said the nurses.

He made the lives of the physicians a burden to them. He waylaid each one who went in or out and importuned them in a way only excused by deep distress.

"Save her, doctor! Save my precious one, and take every dollar I have in the world! What would money be to me if she were to die?"

Dr. Speaks, who was a gentle, patient man, would answer him kindly:

"My dear friend, we will do all that we possibly can to save her; all that medical skill and science can do; all that man can do. But man has not the final power over life and death."

"Oh, do not talk of death!" the husband would groan, wringing his hands.

The other physician, Dr. Thomas, was not so tolerant. When assailed in this manner, he would sternly reply:

"Mr. Strong, we are all doing our best! and would do so if we were not to get a cent. Physicians cannot perform miracles, sir! Neither can money, though you money-eyed men seem to think it can! Be a man, sir! Learn to bear what other men have to bear. Learn to submit to the inevitable!"

Poor John never took offense at these rebukes. He was too utterly absorbed in his anguish to be conscious of affronts.

"She is my life! She is my life!" he would moan.

At which the doctor would seize his hat and go off in impatience.

The tender, patient mother felt the anguish of her son-in-law added to her own sorrow over her only child.

"Poor John! Poor John!" she said to her brother-in-law. "If we should lose Eula, he certainly would follow her very soon! He is almost dead now."

And to John she would say, laying her hand tenderly on his shoulder:

"My poor boy! try to control yourself. You will kill yourself if you go on in this way. Pray, John! pray!"

"Pray!" wildly exclaimed the man, "don't you suppose I have prayed? I have done more! I have offered the Lord to give all I am worth to build churches if He will save her!"

'Oh, my dear, an impious prayer! The Lord's mercy is not bought and sold! No, John, pray that the Lord will save our Eula, if it be His will! but that His will may be done, and that He will give us the strength to bear what He may see fit to send. See, John! Eula is my only child—all that I have in this world, yet I know that if it be the will of the Lord that she must go, I will give her up."

"You never loved your child as I love my wife—my darling wife!"

"The Lord knows how much I love my child, but I know that I must submit to His wise and loving will," said the quietly weeping Christian mother.

"Submit! Submit!" cried the young man, on the verge of frenzy—"bow down like a beaten cur under this cruel blow! No, no, you could not talk so if you loved your only child as I love my dying wife! My dying wife!" he wailed, over and over again.

But Eula was not dying; nor did she die. When all hope was given up and all medicine stopped, and nothing more was attempted to be done for her but to delay the inevitable hour as long as possible, and to ease her passage to the grave, she unexpectedly rallied—"All of her own self," as the wondering nurses said. And even at that very time her distracted husband was crying and blaspheming, and her patient mother was weeping and praying.

Eula had fallen into the first unbroken and refreshing sleep she had enjoyed since the commencement of her illness, from which, after six hours' duration, she awoke free from fever.

When the doctors made their usual early visit they pronounced the crisis past and the patient out of danger. They confessed themselves surprised by a recovery which they could scarcely have hoped for. The nurses were never weary of telling the wonders of it. The patient mother was calmly, deeply, prayerfully grateful.

The husband rejoiced, with a defeated joy, for he could scarcely believe it. He had been too deeply sunk in despair to rise easily.

When it was safe to move Eula, she was carried up to a large, airy chamber on the second floor.

John still lay on the lounge in the sitting-room, where now, reacting from his long and anxious insomnolence, he would fall into deep and dreamless sleep, from which he would awake depressed, incredulous and confused, and would creep upstairs on tiptoe and softly tap on the convalescent's room door and ask how his wife was. This was to assure himself that she was really alive and on the road to recovery, and that she had been carried to her sick room upstairs and not to the cemetery.

The physicians recommended a change of air for the invalid as soon as she should become able to travel. Accordingly John took his wife, accompanied by the whole family party, to Mount Alto on the Blue Ridge.

He spent a week with them there, and then, leaving her in much improved health, and under the charge of her devoted mother and uncle and faithful colored nurse, he returned to Baltimore to look after his much-neglected business. But the long tension of anxiety he had suffered during his wife's nearly fatal illness had left its traces on his countenance. Even now that she had recovered, and he might be supposed to be relieved, the satisfaction and contentment they might reasonably expect to find was not there. He looked grave, careworn, preoccupied.

"What is the matter with Strong?" everybody asked.

It had nothing to do with his business. His business, which he conducted with his usual strict care, prudence and foresight, was never on a more enduring foundation or possessed of more flattering prosperity. Nor could it be his domestic relations. The happiness of his married life was a proverb

among his acquaintances. Nor was it ill-health. His success in athletics, which he had taken up since his return to the city, was as marked as ever. His clubmates—he was living temporarily at his club—believed that his appetite and sleep were normal.

What, then, was the matter with Strong?

They could not tell. They gave it up.

Meanwhile, in addition to his business occupations, he employed his time in making extensive preparations for his wife's return. He was determined that she should not come back to the country-house where they had suffered so much. No! nor to the highly respectable, but rather old-fashioned town-house, where his father had lived so long. So he purchased a handsome modern mansion near Mount Vernon Place, and furnished it in the most superb manner.

When all was ready, he went to Mount Alto and brought his wife and party back to Baltimore.

The travelers arrived at the Baltimore depot late on a damp and dark September night, and found a capacious carriage and attentive servants waiting for them.

Eula invited and entreated her mother and uncle to enter the coach and repair to their house for the night, and spend some of their time with her and her husband. But they wisely declined the invitation, especially as Mr. Strong did not second it, but indeed looked coldly on the proposition.

"No, love," her mother said, "you have been given back to your husband as it were from the brink of the grave. This is your second honeymoon. He naturally wants a tete-a-tete. We will come to see you later."

They parted at the depot.

CHAPTER III

STRANGE CONDUCT OF THE YOUNG HUSBAND

Fate looms full of horror . . . . .
Near at hand perdition threatens!
—Byron.

THE Strongs entered their carriage. But before it started a rather strange thing happened. John Strong placed his wife and her nurse inside the carriage and himself climbed up to a seat beside the driver. They drew up before a handsome brown stone double house, with open lot on either side and a spacious portico in the middle. The mansion was brilliantly lighted, as if indeed to welcome a bride.

With affectionate pride John Strong led his beautiful young wife into the lofty entrance hall, where dark forest green plush hangings, exotic plants and gleaming marble statues suggested Arcadian groves.

"Oh, how lovely! What a charming design, John!" she exclaimed, in surprise and delight, as she stood still to look around her and admire.

He did not reply.

"What a living Mercury! Oh, what an art is this, that can make cold marble to look as if it were about to take wing!" she continued, too much absorbed in her admiration to notice his silence.

"And oh! this exquisite Psyche! And that adorable Minerva! Oh, John, where did you find such treasures of art?"

She turned to him as she spoke and made an exclamation of alarm, for she met a look on his face that curdled her blood. He turned quickly away from her and called in a low, peremptory voice:

"Sampson!"

A man whom she had never seen before stepped quickly to his side. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, strong and stalwart fellow that well became his name.

"My new valet," he said, in a strangely unfamiliar tone, while Eula stood like one petrified with amazement.

"Eula, dearest love! there is nothing the matter. Nothing, believe me!" he said, making an effort to speak steadily.

"Look at these opposite doors," he continued, pointing to the right and left. "I will show you these on the right first. They are your own special apartments," he concluded, putting aside the dark green portiere and leading the way in, closely attended by Sampson and followed by Eula, who could not overcome the feeling of distress and perplexity that filled her bosom. He took her through the whole of the south division of the house.

Imagine, now, a suite of apartments on every floor fit for an empress—a French empress at that—and one will be able to form some idea of the splendor and luxury of the home prepared by the young millionaire for his idolized young wife.

He finally stopped in an elegant little room in the rear of the first floor, where a tea table was set. Standing by the table with his eyes fixed upon the floor and in a hesitating and embarrassed tone, he said:

"Eula, dearest love, I have to leave you now."

She looked up at him in more surprise and uneasiness at his manner—taken in connection with his conduct in the hall—than at his words, for some pressing call might explain the latter.

"An—an—engagement that—that I must not evade; a—a friend in great peril"— He paused and began to tremble, while she stared at him.

The valet, who had followed him all the time, came from the other side of the table and slipped between him and the board and

began to busy himself in arranging the service, which, by the way, was in perfect order; besides, this conduct of the valet was aside from his business.

"John! dear John! A friend in peril! Do not let me keep you for a moment," said Eula, overcoming all manifestation of her uneasiness.

"But to—to leave you on this first evening of your homecoming!"

"Oh, never mind me, John! You will be back as soon as you can, I know. But who is this friend, and what is his peril?"

"I—I cannot tell you. That is—it would take too long. Another time I will tell you," he concluded, with a heavy sigh and a look of deepest distress.

"Then go at once, dear! I am so sorry that you should have cause for such anxiety, and I not able to help you in any manner. But go now. Good-night!" she said, putting up her lips for his parting kiss, but she shrank away again, frightened at the look that came into his face, while the valet in a blundering manner came between them again, to fix something on the table.

John Strong, with a choking "Good-night," hurried from the room, followed by his man.

Eula sank down into a seat, amazed and confounded.

"What can be the matter with John's friend, to reduce him to this state of distress. It can be no ordinary trouble. It is something more than bankruptcy, or even dangerous illness. What is it?" and Eula ran over in her mind all that she could just then remember of the ills that flesh is heir to.

"Something dreadful, to cause this anguish of mere sympathy! It may be his friend's daughter has run away with a coachman. But even that—or his wife may have eloped! That! Yes, that indeed might—Oh, dreadful thought. Some friend of John's whom I know nothing about may have committed murder while we were away, and may be under sentence of death! To be hanged to-morrow, perhaps—yes, for to-morrow is Friday! And John has gone to see him to-night! To take his last leave of him! That, or some awful tragedy as bad it must be, to reduce John to his present state of mind! Yes, that would account for everything in his strange conduct towards me since we reached home! Yes! I can now understand! The grievous contrast between his own state in bringing his wife to this beautiful and happy home and that of his stricken friend, condemned to death, suddenly occurred to him and overcame him! Dear, sympathetic John!" she murmured, softly.

But she could not make up her mind whether the imperiled friend had been deserted by betrothed sweetheart, wife or daughter—or sentenced to be hanged; and so at last she concluded that all three calamities might have befallen him, or the most serious of them at least; he had been forsaken by his betrothed, had killed his rival, and was to be hanged for the murder. There was not, to be sure, much logic in Eula's conclusions; but then Eula had not a logical mind. And so, though her conclusions were very far-fetched, they were almost convincing.

She rang the bell and ordered tea to be served, and that, instead of the footman, her maid Mandy should serve it. This Mandy, as we know, had been her nurse from infancy and was now her maid. A deep affection had grown up between them from Eula's babyhood to the present time.

When Mandy entered with the tea service, her mistress said:

"Your master has gone out to see a friend who is in distress. It is doubtful whether he will be in again to-night. I want you to sleep in the little dressing-room adjoining my bed-chamber within call, for now that they are all gone from me, I shall feel lonesome, Mandy."

"Glad you let me stay 'long 'o yo', honey. 'Deed I is. I has had my own misgibbins 'bout yo', honey," answered the woman, with a sigh, as she poured out her mistress's tea.

"What misgivings, Mandy, dear?"

"Why, yo' aine jus' so strong since yo' sickness, youn' mist'ess, an' I jes' misgibs as yo' do too much."

Eula laughed and took a cup of tea from Mandy, saying:

"Oh, is that all, Mandy, dear? You can never get over thinking of me as your baby!"

When tea was over, and the woman had gathered the service upon a large waiter to remove it, her mistress said:

"After you have taken those things downstairs, come back and stay with me to pass away this lonely evening."

It proved a lonesome evening to Eula, notwithstanding the nurse came and sat with her and talked of the old times in "Ole Wirginny, 'fo de wah" stories, indeed, of stirring times, told in Mandy's own dialect, and in her graphic style.

It was late before the maid and nurse could persuade her mistress, who was also her baby, to go to rest. Even then Eula could not sleep, but lay tossing from side to side, listening for the step of John upon the stairs, or calling out to Mandy in the dressing room to know if she were awake,

in the cruel thoughtlessness of a spoiled child, which no one but a devoted nurse would have borne.

The long night passed, but did not bring John.

Eula in her restlessness arose early and went all over the south side of her splendid house, to pass away the time. She delayed breakfast, expecting him to come.

As it drew near ten o'clock, and he had not made his appearance, faintness compelled her to take her breakfast alone. Then she ordered the morning papers to be brought and looked carefully over them, but found no notice of any one to be hanged that day—one of her guesses as to the cause of John's absence. She was growing more anxious every hour.

At length she rang for her maid, and when she appeared, said:

"Come, nurse! let us go and look over the north side of this house. I have not seen that yet. We will begin with the lower rooms and go up."

They went downstairs and into the beautiful hall and to the veiled door leading into the north side.

"De key aine in de lock, an' de do' is sc'wed up!" said the woman, when she had made the examination.

"Screwed up! That's strange! Oh! but I suppose that part of the house is not yet furnished. I dare say it contains the ball-room and the reception-rooms, and Mr. Strong has left them empty in order to consult me. But we will not be disappointed, nurse. We will go upstairs and see if we can find a door of communication on one of the upper floors."

They retraced their steps, but found the communicating door as securely fastened on the second floor as on the first. And such was the case on every floor, even to the attic.

"Mr. Strong is determined not to let us see the bare rooms until he gets ready to furnish them," said Eula, as she gave up her enterprise, and returned to her boudoir, where she dismissed her attendant and sat down to think.

The more intensely she thought, the more depressed, anxious and foreboding she became. She could scarcely bear to sit there inactive. She thought of going to call on her mother, but reflected that John might return during her absence, and that in his trouble, whatever it might be, he would need her presence and sympathy. So she sat and waited, or rose and paced the floor, or wandered over the open part of the house.

She had thrown herself down in one of the luxurious chairs in the drawing-room, when a footman entered and handed her a letter, saying that it had been left at the door by Sampson, who had said that no answer was required, and had gone.

The superscription was in the handwriting of John Strong. Eula flew to her room and broke the letter open. As she read her cheek paled and flushed, and paled again in quick succession; her breath went and came in gasps. The letter was almost illegible, incoherent and incomprehensible. Yet it did in its incoherence and incomprehensibility convey one heart-breaking meaning: *Their married life was ended forever!*

But why? That she could not make out. It was not for want of her husband's love! No; the most ardent, agonized love breathed through every line of that maddening letter! What was it then? What had come between such lovers as they were?

She could not sit still. She sprang from her chair and hurried up and down the floor in a frenzy of excitement, trying to think out the meaning of this wretched mystery.

Suddenly, a revolting thought struck her with such force that she recoiled, and then stood still as if turned to stone! Thoughts, explanations, came in a torrent now.

He was not her husband! He was some other woman's husband, she thought. In his boyish days he had been led into a foolish marriage by an evil woman, who had afterwards deserted him and given out the report of her own death, which he had believed, and now this woman has reappeared to blackmail him, and he sees that his present marriage is criminal. To avoid a public scandal he has determined that they must live under the same roof, but in separate apartments. But if this were the case—and she could not find any other solution to his conduct—it would not be this partial separation which he had settled by his letter that would satisfy her conscience! It must be a total and enduring separation, as far as this world is concerned. She must go out of his house, and go far, far away, and never be heard of again! Stung almost to madness by the sharp sorrow and humiliation of this thought, she dropped into a chair before her writing-desk and wrote out her question in the first fiery words that occurred to her. She sealed and directed the note, and then rang the bell.

The footman answered it.

"Is Sampson in the house?" she inquired.

"No, ma'am. He went away the minute he left the letter," replied the man.

"Have you any idea when he will be here?"

"No, ma'am."

"Watch for him, and when he comes send him up to me."

"Yes, ma'am," said the man, and, seeing that there were no further orders, he retired.

Eula recommenced her restless pacing the floor. If Sampson should not come in during the day, how should she get her letter delivered? She could not send it to John's place of business, lest it should be opened by some clerk who had charge of his commercial correspondence. She must wait for the reappearance of Sampson. If he did not come soon she would send the letter to the office by Mandy, with orders to give it only into Mr. Strong's hands, or, if she could not do that, to bring it back to her. But she was not reduced to that extremity.

Early in the afternoon Sampson made his appearance in her room, bowed and stood awaiting orders.

"Where is your master?" inquired the lady.

"On the south side of the house, madam. Just come in."

"Tell me how he is. Is he quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you, madam."

Eula longed to ask a score of questions, as: What time did he return last night? Where did he sleep? Where did he breakfast and lunch? Who waits on him besides yourself? But she felt the impropriety of attempting to satisfy her anxiety by interrogating the servant. So she gave him her letter, saying:

"Take this to your master at once, and say that I await an answer."

The man bowed gravely and withdrew.

She was intensely anxious! Yet she realized how many hours it would take her husband to write his explanation, or vindication, whichever it might be! But quicker than she could have dared to hope, in a very few minutes, indeed, the footman rapped and entered her room and handed her a note, saying:

"Sampson left this at the door and said there was no answer, ma'am."

When the messenger had left the room, Eula tore the note open and read:

"Not an instant can I leave you, my loved and honored wife, under such a degrading delusion. No, my Eula! even in my despair—from the depths, I still rejoice that I can assure you—can swear by all that I hold most sacred in this world—even by your adored self—that I never married, never loved, never thought of any other woman but your sacred self! I am a little less distracted now—now that I have got the letter of this morning off my mind. I will write to you more fully. And though I may not tell you the cause, yet I hope my next letter may be more satisfactory. I will not now detain the messenger from carrying you this relief from your fears."

The lines were evidently run off in such great haste that there was no time or thought for date, greeting or signature.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT WAS THE SECRET?

A doom that makes each desolate—
A wrong he dare not tell. —Anon.

EULA was relieved, indeed, from humiliation and despair, but not from anxiety and fear. She waited in almost insufferable suspense for the promised letter. It came the next morning, written more coherently than the others. Here it is:

"From My Exile in the North Side,
"This Friday night in Nov. —.

"My beloved and Adored: I have already told you that our happy married life is done and ended. I began to fear this during the blessed days of your convalescence at Mount Vision. I became assured of it during our stay at Mount Alto. It was that knowledge and not the state of your health which compelled me to take a separate room from yours at the hotel. It was that knowledge that forced me to take this city house so that you should be in easy reach of your friends if—anything—should happen to me! There! I feel that I have frightened you! Do not be alarmed, oh, my love! there is no danger. Finally, Eula, it was that knowledge that constrained me to screw up the communicating doors between the north and south divisions of the house. The sunny side is yours. I have taxed the genius of artists, as well as the skill of architects and decorators, to make your home as superb and splendid, as beautiful and luxurious, as the palace of an oriental princess. It is all yours, not mine. The north side is mine—bare and bleak as my own storm-swept life. I have placed fifty thousand dollars in bank to your account. That will keep you in comfort. But, ah, good heaven! How like an insult this must seem to you coming from me, who robbed you of all a loving woman holds most precious. Yet you must know how I love you! I will see you sometimes—as often as my doom will permit, but never alone! You must not expect that! We will correspond sometimes by letter and messages.

"I have had little bell handles concealed behind the velvet portieres on your side of the communicating doors on every landing. When you wish to see me, ring the bell, and if I can I will come to you. When you write to me, ring the bell and slip the letter under the door. I shall get it and return my answer the same way. This will be our only confidential intercourse. I ought to go farther from you, but I cannot leave you. Besides, to avoid scandal, we must live under the same roof, appear in public together as often as we can, and show the world that in spite of all they may hear to the contrary, we are the best of friends. Oh, Eula! I write this calmly, almost coolly, though with a breaking heart! I write it in the dead of night, as such a letter should be written. Are you sleeping in peace, my love? My love! Heaven grant that you are! Guard our secret from the world as long as possible, and I will bless you forever! Destroy this letter as soon as you have read it, lest it should fall into profane hands. And, oh, above all things, keep our miserable secret.

"Your Lost but Devoted Husband."

"Secret? Secret? He has told me no secret! He has kept the secret to himself! What is it? Oh, what is it that has wrenched us apart?" she wailed, as she tore the fatal letter into shreds and threw them into the grate fire. Then she sank into her chair and gave herself up to despair.

In the course of the day her mother called, and started as soon as she saw her daughter's face, exclaiming:

"Why, what is the matter, Eula, my child? You are as pale as death and trembling like a leaf!"

What a relief it would have been to confide in that dear mother and find sympathy and counsel! But Eula was loyal to her strange husband, and answered evasively:

"I do not feel quite well, mamma, dear."

"Malaria!" exclaimed the elder lady, putting her daughter's indisposition on the back of that scapegoat that carries away so many of our ills, even delirium tremens, into the wilderness where they can never be found out. "Yes, malaria! You have a chill. Your hands are as cold as ice. Your nails are blue! I must send for Dr. Speaks! Where is John?" she quickly demanded.

"At his business, of course, mamma. These are his business hours," replied Eula, speaking as she hoped.

"Did he know you were indisposed when he left you?"

"No mamma, dear."

"Of course not! You would not have let him know it lest it should worry him! John is too devoted to his business, and you are too devoted to him. You both want good common sense!" said Mrs. Beverly, as she rose and went toward the bell-pull.

"Pray do not send for a doctor, mamma, for if you do I shall imagine myself ill, and perhaps may make myself so," pleaded Eula.

"Very well! When John comes home he will do it, I am sure," replied the mother, unwillingly resuming her seat.

After stopping to lunch with her daughter, Mrs. Beverly went away.

She also called the next day, feeling anxious about her daughter's health. But finding Eula in a better physical condition, she was relieved. Naturally she again inquired for John, and was told by Eula that he had gone downtown to his business; and she went away without any suspicion of anything being wrong with the young pair.

After this Mrs. Beverly came almost daily; sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon and sometimes in the evening, but without ever meeting Mr. Strong.

"Is John never at home?" she inquired one evening.

"Why, of course, mamma! He is at home every day—all the time except when he is at his business," answered Eula. (And so he was at home in the other half of the house.)

"Curious I never see him. I wonder if, being his mother-in-law, he considers me his natural enemy?" surmised the elder lady, in a thoughtful tone.

"What nonsense, dear mamma! You know he is very fond of you," said Eula, in such earnest tones that her mother was reassured.

When her mother had gone, Eula wrote a note to her husband, saying:

"Mamma is wondering why she never sees you here. She is coming Sunday after church to dine with me. Can you not join us?"

She carried this note to the communicating door on the lower floor, rang the bell, and slipped it under the door. As it was evening she thought her husband would be in, so she sat down at the foot of the stairs to await the issue. Presently, the bell rang and a slip of paper was pushed under the door. She took it up and read it by the light of the hall chandelier. The answer was short, but very kind:

"Yes, dearest one' Then or any other time when you send for me to meet you in her company."

Sunday came. It was the first Sunday since the young couple entered their new home. As Eula left her door on her way to church, she was delightfully surprised to see her husband on the portico waiting for her.

"We must go to church together to-day," said John, after as affectionate a greeting as the publicity of the spot would permit, "your uncle and mother will join us there, I presume. Give Sampson your books to carry," he added, as the man-servant came out of the end door of the north side and walked up behind them.

Eula, wondering, handed her prayer book and hymnal to the man, who already carried a roll of music in his hands.

When they reached the church, they parted at the door, Eula taking her books from the servant's hands, went up the aisle; John Strong, followed by his valet, up to the choir, to which he had belonged from his youth.

Eula joined her mother and uncle when she found their pew, and gave them the silent, decorous greeting permissible in a church during service. But, ah! she could pay but little attention to that service, or to the sermon that followed. Her mind dwelt upon the fact of Sampson following them

to church. Did John mean to keep his word in its harsh intent? Were they never to be alone together, even in the public street? What could be the meaning of all this? She felt the need of counsel. If she only could have consulted her minister—the good old man who had been her spiritual guide ever since she lived in the city; who had prepared her for her confirmation, and had performed the solemn marriage ceremony which had united wife and husband in a union never to be dissolved save by death! If she could only have consulted him, the best of all counsellors, what a relief it would have been! Or, if now she could take into her confidence even her old uncle, there might be some comfort! But to bear this intolerable burden of mystery and isolation and deal with this maddening problem alone! She might have been anywhere else for the good the church service did her. She could neither follow the prayers nor listen to the sermon. She could only distinguish the deep bass tones of John's voice in the "Miserere," and never, she thought, had she heard the notes rolled from the depths in such tragic tones.

When the service was over and the benediction pronounced, Eula and her party left the church, and were joined by Mr. Strong and his valet in the vestibule. John shook hands cordially with his uncle and mother-in-law, and when they reached the sidewalk, he drew Mrs. Beverly's arm under his, and said gaily to Major Beverly:

"Look after your niece, my dear sir, while I have a little talk with my mother-in-law."

"You are to come home and dine with us, you know, uncle dear," said Eula, as she accepted the offered arm of the major and followed, while the valet, laden with the prayer books and hymnals, brought up the rear.

Eula was pleased to hear her mother and husband chatting pleasantly together. Mrs. Beverly was gently reproaching him for making a false god of his business to such an extent that he had no time for his home. John did not defend himself, but gently smote his breast and murmured:

"Mea culpa! Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa! pretending to accuse himself.

When they reached home Eula took her mother upstairs to lay off her bonnet and wraps, and to have a little chat. They did not meet the two gentlemen again until they met at dinner, where that "everlasting Sampson," as Eula had begun to call him, helped to wait on the table.

After dinner John took his guest off to his little smoking room to try a particularly fine brand of cigars. Eula and her mother enjoyed a tete-a-tete in the drawing room. The family party met again at tea, and when that was over they repaired to church for the evening service. At its close they parted at the church door. Major and Mrs. Beverly went back to the family hotel where they boarded, and John and Eula walked home together, closely followed by Sampson.

Although it was a dark night and the street lamps, brilliant as they were, served rather to dazzle than to guide, and the sidewalk was rough from being in the process of repaving, and Eula needed his arm, John never offered it to her, and when she attempted to take it, shrank away from her muttering:

"Don't! Don't do that!" so that she recoiled in dismay.

They came along the street approaching the house on its north side. When they reached the corner, John suddenly exclaimed:

"Sampson! see Mrs. Strong safely into the house, and then return to me," and with these words he rushed into the door leading into his north side of the building. The amazed and distressed wife was on the point of asking the man: "What is the matter with your master?" but refrained. Not even to relieve her almost insupportable distress and anxiety would she question his servant about her husband. But she stood gazing after him, and towards the door through which he had disappeared, until Sampson's respectful tone roused her from her trance-like stand.

"Shall I go up and knock, ma'am?" he inquired.

"Yes," she answered, with a start, and walked rapidly up the front steps, and entered her lonely home.

Mandy met her in the hall, and seeing her look so ill, persuaded her to go to bed at once, and take some hot mulled wine, which she prepared and served with some delicate water cakes. Eula sipped the posset to please her nurse, but could not be persuaded to taste the wafers. No! nor when Mandy drew the curtains, lowered the light, and left her to repose, could she go to sleep.

Appetite and sleep had at once deserted her. There was but one small drop of comfort in her cup of sorrow—it was that her relations had not, and could not, have any suspicion of estrangement between her and her husband. Nor in the immediate following days did anything occur to arouse their suspicion. Mrs. Beverly frequently came, sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by the major. John dropped in occasionally, in the evening during these visits. Indeed they were the only occasions on which John came to see his wife. During these visits a certain singularity of John's manner that escaped the notice of the major and Mrs. Beverly, but attracted that of the unhappy young wife, coupled with what had gone before, of which the others knew noth-

ing; it was that, although his smiles and words when addressing her were always pleasant and affectionate, yet he always took a seat at some distance from her and never looked at her. No! even while speaking he would look down at the carpet or at the tips of his fingers—anywhere, but at her. And her mother and uncle would go away congratulating each other on the happy married life of their dearest Eulalia.

In due season the young wife sent out her "at home" cards, and began to receive and pay visits, though she had no heart for company. The Strongs gave a dinner party at which the young matron was very much admired. And they accepted invitations to other dinner parties, and went together, but no one observed anything amiss in their deportment towards each other. When the season was more advanced Eula gave a ball which proved a great social success. As her husband always made a point of going out with her, she accepted every invitation, in order to be in his company as much as possible.

And so weeks went on to months, and no suspicion of that ghastly skeleton in their closet was excited among their friends, relatives, or acquaintances.

CHAPTER V

THE EVIL SPREADS

A whisper woke the air.
—Osgood.

But it was not so easy to prevent the suspicions of the servants. In fact it was impossible. They knew that their master and mistress, though living under the same roof, and apparently on friendly and even affectionate terms with each other, were absolutely separated "in bed and board." The cause of their separation they did not know any more than did the young wife, poor soul! But if they had no knowledge, so much more latitude for surmises of the wildest character. These were at first only whispered to each other in dark corners, or expressed in hints, nods, or shakes of the head.

If they had been loyal to their master and mistress, and had kept their opinions to themselves, no harm might have been done, but they could not resist the temptation to whisper the mystery to the servants of other families, who in turn whispered it to their masters and mistresses, or to such of them as would listen to the gossip; and so the scandal spread with the usual exaggerations.

Everyone seemed to know that there was something shockingly wrong with the Strongs; that though they pretended to live together to blind people's eyes, yet they lived apart in different sections of the house, with all means of communication closed, and each having a different establishment; and that they never met except in company. This much was known and was bad enough. What was invented was worse.

As is usual in such cases, the parties immediately concerned, and those nearest and dearest to them, were the last to hear anything about these rumors. But at length a—let us say—"a blessed good-natured friend," making a morning call on Mrs. Beverly, put on a confidential and affectionate air, and gently inquired:

"Now, my dear, tell me what is this trouble between your daughter and her husband?"

"Between Mr. and Mrs. Strong?" inquired the lady in genuine surprise, and some dignity withal. "I do not understand you, madam."

"Oh, my dear, I refer to their separation, of course."

"Their—I beg your pardon?" questioned Mrs. Beverly.

"Their separation. So sad in a young pair, you know."

"Separation! Really, madam, you seem to have taken up some very strange and totally inadmissible ideas concerning Mr. and Mrs. Strong," coldly replied the lady.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Beverly, I am sure I beg you to excuse me for alluding to the subject, but I thought a misfortune so generally known might be discussed between such friends as ourselves. If I had not thought so, I am sure"— The visitor did not finish by saying what she was sure of, for the eyes of the other lady were fixed upon her with such a searching and indignant stare as to put her to utter confusion.

"Will you kindly enlighten me as to your grounds for what you have just said?" coldly inquired Mrs. Beverly.

"Oh, my dear lady, surely you, their mother, must know what everybody else knows about them. That is, that they—young Mr. and Mrs. Strong—have not lived together since they returned from Mount Alto in the Blue Ridge," said the visitor, somewhat offended. She then repeated the rumors about their living apart from each other, etc.

"You have been misinformed, madam," replied Mrs. Beverly, in so severe a tone that the busybody who had annoyed her immediately rose and took leave.

Mrs. Beverly walked up and down the floor in great trouble. Self-respect and consideration for her daughter and son-in-law had prevented her from pursuing the subject and investigating the origin of the degrading rumors, if such rumors existed, but she could not get rid of the subject as easily as she got rid of the intruder who

had introduced it. That such rumors should get into circulation was, in itself, most distressing, even should they be without the slightest foundation. But, fearful possibility, if there were grounds for them! Many little occurrences during her visits to the Strong mansion that made no impression on her at the time, now recurred to her memory, with painful suggestions connected with these rumors. She remembered now, and wondered she had not thought of it before, that as often as she had visited them, she had not sat down to a meal with her daughter and son-in-law since the first Sunday after their return, when they had a family dinner. John, on such occasions, happened always to be at his business, or at his lodge, or at a political meeting, or at a stag dinner party. But never since that day had she met him at the table with his wife. On other occasions, both at their own house and at her own rooms, and in general society, she had met them together; and certainly, as she recalled the circumstances, nothing seemed wrong between them. Their manners toward each other were ever cordial and affectionate.

"It is the gossip of the servants that has started these rumors which evil minded people have circulated. It is quite enough that poor John's devotion to his business should keep him downtown at meal times to set the servants talking and making mountains out of mole hills! But I haven't seen her for a fortnight! This dreadful weather has made such a prisoner of me!" she concluded. She got ready, and in a state of great anxiety started on her visit.

She found Eula in her boudoir, a luxurious little room in the rear of the second floor, where the lonely young wife spent most of her time. She was lying on a reclining chair, looking pale, sad and idle. To her mother's anxious inquiries, she answered that she was quite well, as she arose to kiss and embrace her beloved visitor, and to place her in the most comfortable chair, and to relieve her of her wraps.

"Well? Yes? And happy, my darling? Are you happy?"

"Why, what should make me otherwise, mamma?" Eula inquired, with a too evidently false smile.

"Oh, nothing, dear, nothing! unless it might be your husband's peculiar manners."

Eula sank slowly down in her chair, and turned away her head, for she felt her face turn cold, and knew it had blanched and did not want her mother to see it.

"Where is John, now, my love?"

"In his counting house, I suppose. He usually is in the day time, you know, mamma," said Eula, turning around and forcing herself to look and speak calmly.

Mrs. Beverly watched her daughter's face with all a mother's insight and anxiety.

"Eula!" she presently inquired, gravely, "is there anything wrong between you and your husband?"

Every vestige of color fled from the young wife's face. She trembled from head to foot, and she replied, evasively:

"Trouble between me and my husband, mamma? Why, how should there be? You know how we love each other—quite absurdly! And look around you! See how he lavishes his wealth—nay, his life upon me! For it is for me that he toils so hard at his business, to surround me with splendor and luxury, and to adorn me with jewels. God bless him!" There was a ring of sincerity and truth in her tones as she finished speaking that could not be discredited.

Not for the world would Mrs. Beverly have told her daughter of the rumors that had reached her ears that morning. But still she felt that she must go to the root of the matter if she could. So she said:

"Then it is I whom he dislikes! It is very natural!" she added, with a sigh.

"You, mamma! John dislike you!" Eula exclaimed, in genuine astonishment that her mother could imagine such a thing.

"Yes! I am his mother-in-law. Married men, you know, consider their mothers-in-law their natural enemies."

Eula was too much amazed to make any reply. She gazed breathlessly at her mother, who continued:

"If this were not so, why is it that John will never sit down to the table with me—never? If I am to banish him from his own table by my presence, I had better absent myself altogether! It will be my duty to do so!" added her mother, but without the least show of bad temper.

"Dearest, best beloved mamma!" exclaimed Eula, recovering herself, and glad that here, at least, she could utter an unqualified disclaimer, "how can you hint at such a nonsensical idea! You, whom my dear John loves as if you were his own blessed mother!—his precious mother whom he lost in his childhood! When did John ever treat you with—I will not say coldness, but even indifference? When has he looked at you, or spoken to you, but with warm and cordial affection? Say, now, has he ever?" she earnestly inquired.

"Never, my dear! Never! I must say that for John. But"— Mrs. Beverly paused, for she was about to mention the reports in circulation, when caution arrested the words on her lips.

"But what, mamma dear?" anxiously inquired Eula, fixing her eyes searchingly on her mother's perplexed face.

"But a mother-in-law is apt to be doubtful on such subjects. We will drop it."

"Yes, mamma, for it is not fair to John."

Mrs. Beverly spent the day with her daughter, but did not see her son-in-law, nor did she probe the subject of his absence farther, so she left, far from being satisfied.

Subsequent visits only served to confirm her doubts concerning the terms on which the young people lived together, for now she never met John at all, not even between meals. Nor could she venture to allude to his absence without causing so much distress to her unhappy daughter as to seal her lips on the subject. So it came to this—that John Strong's name was never mentioned between them.

In the Strong mansion, as winter advanced, matters went from bad to worse. In the beginning of the social season the newly married couple had gone but little into society; had given a ball and a few dinners. As the season advanced, however, they withdrew more and more into seclusion that was fast sinking into obscurity. They gave no more entertainments, accepted no more invitations. For a little while longer Eula continued to receive and return calls; but at length even this slight hold on social life slipped away. She had no longer heart for society. And so they seemed to sink into the gulf of oblivion.

"Does anybody know anything about the Strongs?" or questions to that effect would be put occasionally, when some topic of conversation would recall them to some one's mind. Apparently no one did know, unless it was some gossip with a troublesome memory for disagreeable subjects, who would suggest:

"That report, don't you know, which was in circulation about them last autumn—separation or something. What was it all about, now?"

At last even these questions ceased to be put, and the young couple, popular as they had once been, seemed to have died out of the memory of society. "Society" had something to think of!

CHAPTER VI

THE GLOOM DEEPENS

A home without a smile.
—Bulwer.

So much for the outside world. But if it had known the secrets of that prison house, it would not so easily have forgotten the Strongs. Sorrow, terror, and despair dwelt there. Strong now confined himself to his side of the house entirely, and never left it but for his place of business. He never came near his wife, whose heart was breaking. Her mother came to see her often, but the one tabooed subject was never touched. Mandy watched her mistress with all the solicitous anxiety of devoted affection. And mother and maidservant saw her wasting away from day to day without the power to help her, because she firmly resisted inquiry and interference.

The year was drawing to its close and the mystery to its solution. Christmas and a crisis was at hand. It was Christmas Eve. Eula was alone in her sitting room. She was lying back in her reclining chair, brooding over the mystery of her misery, the more maddening to-night from memories awakened by and associations connected with this anniversary.

It was last Christmas Eve, only a year ago, that John Strong and herself had become betrothed lovers, and he had placed upon her finger the little circle of diamonds, praying that the circle might typify the eternity of their love, and the radiance of their happiness. And how happy they had been!—how happy in that present! how hopeful of the future! And now, how wretched their present! how hopeless their future! Three weeks—three anxious, perplexing, miserable weeks had passed since she had seen her husband. When only a few days had gone by without seeing or hearing from him, she availed herself of the arrangement he had made for their correspondence, and had written a note and had slipped it under the door and waited—minutes, hours—but no notice had been taken of it. Day after day she repeated the experiment, but without results. She had inquired of Sampson, only to be informed that no one in the house had seen Mr. Strong for a week.

Her last effort was to send Mandy with a letter addressed to his counting house. The faithful creature gave it to a messenger, who took it and returned with a message that there was no answer. Day after day the disappointed and apprehensive wife had repeated this experiment, but without results. One day she had written that if he continued to disregard her appeals, her insupportable anxiety would drive her to going in person to seek him at his counting house, which she feared might annoy him. Mandy had taken this letter as she had taken the others. In two hours she had returned with an answer. Eula had seized the letter eagerly and had torn open the envelope, and read these cruel and alarming words:

"Woman! if you have a spark of sense, or a touch of pity, forbear to torture me with your letters. And do not dream of such madness as a visit to me in my counting house!—unless you wish to precipitate a

catastrophe! You are warned! Disregard this warning and—your fate be on your own head!"

She had dropped the note, clasped her temples between her hands and sank into her chair.

Mandy's sympathies were practical. She had brought her mistress a glass of wine, made her drink it, and then softly inquired:

"Shall I send Abram after the madam, honey?"

"No, no, no, no! nor ever speak to my mother of this trouble of mine," the poor young creature replied, as she handed back the half-emptied glass and sank again into the depths of her easy chair.

Considering herself under a sort of pledge to her husband to "guard their miserable secret," as he called it, though it was rather his secret than hers, since she knew not the cause of their separation; doomed to bear the dreadful burden alone, the wretched young wife feared at times that her mind would give way beneath the strain. Day after day had passed, and she had heard no more of her husband, and made no further attempts to correspond with him.

But now, on this Christmas Eve, when she sat alone in her room, she felt that the limit of endurance had been reached. She must see him and speak with him; must have this dreadful misunderstanding explained or go mad! She knew that he was at home in his side of the house—"so near and yet so far!" It was useless to slip a note under the door, for it would be disregarded. Useless to go round to the entrance to the north side and knock or ring, for no response to such summons would come.

On this Christmas Eve then, rendered desperate by long sustained suspense and insupportable anxiety, she determined upon a bold stroke—to force an entrance into the closed side and see her husband, cost what it might! She had thought of this before to-night, and had even provided herself with a screwdriver to remove the screws, for they were all on her side of the communicating doors. She would try her desperate experiment this very night. But in order to carry out her intention with secrecy, she must wait until everyone about the house should be in bed. Mandy was the most vigilant watcher in the establishment. For ever since the young wife had been practically deserted by her husband, the faithful Mandy had slept in a small room adjoining the bed-chamber of her mistress, "to watch over the poor child," as she put it, and be within call if wanted. Nor would the devoted creature go to her rest until she believed her mistress to be not only in bed, but asleep. Poor Mandy's devotion did not always conduce to the comfort of her "child," for her snores when she slept would often awake the latter from her light slumbers.

It was now eleven o'clock and Mandy was obstinately sitting on a hassock in the corner of the room, vowing that she was not a bit sleepy, while she was gaping, yawning, nodding and sometimes half tumbling off her seat. In order to get rid of Mandy, Eula began to undress. Mandy roused herself to wait on her mistress. Eula soon retired and pretended to fall asleep. Mandy, half asleep, tumbled into her bed, and her sonorous snores soon proved, or seemed to prove, the profundity of her sleep. Did they? Eula thought so at least. But no white woman was ever a match for a colored woman in subtlety, where the interest of one she loves is involved.

Mandy had watched her mistress all that day with the eager, anxious insight that only devoted affection could give. She had seen, as she afterwards said, "that poor child was up to somethin' an' wanted to be by herse'f;" she was, therefore, determined to sit up all night if necessary, rather than leave her young mistress unwatched. She had obstinately sat upon her stool trying to keep awake. When her mistress at last went to bed and pretended to go to sleep, Mandy detected her simulated slumber and felt more convinced than ever that she "was up to somethin';" may be to kill herself—Mandy must watch and find out. So she also pretended to go to sleep; what was right in the mistress could not be wrong in the maid.

She snored industriously until, in an instant's interval, she heard her mistress moving softly about the room. Next she heard the snap of a match, and she began to snore again to keep up the deception; and while she watched from the place where she lay in her dark room, she could see through the wide open door into the partially lighted chamber in which her mistress moved silently about.

She saw her slip on her dressing gown, take a candle, and pass out of her chamber into the passage.

Then Mandy got softly out of bed, and in her stocking feet silently followed her mistress. When Mandy noiselessly opened the door leading into the passage she saw her mistress, light in hand, gliding down the front stairs. She followed her, keeping in the dark behind the rays of the candle.

Eula reached the bottom of the stairs, placed the candle on an oak table against the wall, went to the door, put aside the portieres, and began to work upon the screws. More than ever did the old nurse see the necessity of watching her now. She

sat down on one of the steps out of sight, and watched the young house-breaker.

Patiently the amateur burglar worked, and patiently the amateur detective watched.

"She aint agwine to do nuffen to herse'f, t'anks be to the Marster!" mused Mandy. "She's agwine to see her own husban' wedder or no, an' yight she is! An' she's agwine to hab it out long ob him onct fer all, an' make up long ob him dese blessed Kistmas times. An yight she is in dat, too!"

At length the last screw was out, the last bolt drawn, but still the lock remained fast and she had no key. Luckily for her purpose the lock was on her side of the door. She paused for a few moments as if uncertain what to do, then took up her screwdriver and plied it industriously to the socket of the lock, and it soon became free and the door was open.

Eula seemed to hesitate for a minute, then drew a deep breath, passed into the forbidden precincts, and closed the door after her.

"It 'minds me ob Blue Beard! It do dat!" muttered Mandy, as she crept down to the lowest step and seated herself on it, resting her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands, making herself as comfortable as possible, though sorely tempted to creep in after her mistress.

"But I woane foller or her no furder; I woane be that low-life mean to go ebedrappin' b'hine husban' an' wife w'en dey's a-makin' fren's 'long one anudder. I jes wate yere till I see the upshot of it all. But deed Ise powerful uneasy bout that po' chile! I pray de good Lor' no harm woane cum to her! 'Deed I does! But Lor', what harm could cum to her long ob her goin' to see her own preshus husban'? I dunno dough! Oh, my good, Marster, Lor'! take care ob me po' deah lam'!" prayed Mandy, with clasped hands, as she watched and waited.

But she was so weary and impatient that minutes seemed hours to her.

"I do suppose if dey do hab it all out—wot ebber it is to hab out, fer nobody 'pears to know, an' de Lor' knows I doane—dey'll be all de hours ob de nite an' day 'fendin' and provin' fo' dey make frens agin. An' yere I shill hab to stay an' wate, cose I can't lebe de chile permiskus yere dese times!" she concluded, with a deep sigh and yawn, as she settled herself on the step with her back against the balustrade. Here the position proved too much for her African temperament, and both affection and curiosity succumbed to fatigue and drowsiness, and Mandy began to nod and doze, and finally went to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

A CRISIS

"Disgrace and ill
And shameful death are nigh."
—Sir Walter Scott.

MANDY was roused by a terrible shriek that tore through the hall like an explosion. She started to her feet and stood nearly petrified with terror! The moon had risen and was shining through the lace-lined transom over the front of the door and filling the hall with a faint silvery light. All was now as silent as death. Before the woman had time to recover herself, the sound of hurrying steps was heard, the door was pushed open and the portieres pushed aside by the boot of a huge man, who entered, bearing a burden in his arms. By the dim moonlight Mandy was able to recognize Sampson, who at the same time perceived her.

"Get a light here, woman! Your mistress is badly hurt!" he exclaimed, dropping into one of the hall armchairs with the insensible form of Eula across his knees.

"Oh, my Heavenly Marster, I knowed it. I knowed how it was agwine to be!" wailed Mandy, clasping her hands.

"A light, woman! a light! Quick, quick!" cried Sampson.

"Yes, sah! Oh, Miss Euly! Miss Euly! I jes' knowed how it were agwine to be!" sobbed the woman, wringing her hands, as she turned and ran up the stairs, stumbling, falling, and scuffling along, as she hurried to her own den and procured a light, with which she scuffled down again with break-neck speed.

"Now light me up to the lady's bed-room," directed Sampson.

Shaking with sobs and blinded with tears, Mandy went before, carrying the candle, and Sampson followed, bearing the unconscious woman into her chamber, where he laid her on her bed.

"Oh, sah, how did dis yere happen?" inquired Mandy, through her sobs, as she tenderly arranged her mistress's disordered gown.

"She had a bad fall. Now I must"—

"An' oh! wheah's her husban', sah? Wheah's he as ought"—

"I don't know. I have no time to talk! I must go and wake the servants and send for the doctor."

"An' sen' one fer her mudder, sah! Sen' fer de po' chile's own mudder to cum to her in her t'ubble," pleaded Mandy.

"Very well; I will. Now mind your mistress," ordered Sampson, impatiently, as he hurried away on his errand.

Their brief talk had taken but very few minutes, and while it lasted Mandy had been tenderly engaged about the person of her mistress, laying her in a more comfortable position and smoothing the clothes around her. Now she took the limp hand, kissed it fondly, stooped and looked intently into the pallid, deathly face, and noticed for the first time blood oozing from a wound on the side of the head and trickling under the thick curls.

Weeping, she went and brought a bowl of water and a sponge and towels, and washed the wound as well as she could, put a compress of ice upon it, and bound it up. Next she tried to force a few drops of brandy between the lips of the patient, but without satisfactory results. Finally she sat down and began to bathe her face with cologne-water. Mandy was still engaged in her anxious efforts to restore her mistress to consciousness, when Mrs. Beverly and Dr. Speaks arrived together.

Dr. Speaks was the intimate friend as well as the family physician of the Strongs and Beverlys. The mother was terribly excited, and hurried question upon question, such as: "How much was she hurt? Where was she wounded? How did it happen? Where? When? What caused it? Where was Mr. Strong? Had he been sent for?" and so forth.

Sampson was not present and Mandy could give but few answers. Finally, and in a very few minutes, the doctor took his old friend by the arm and led her to an easy chair at the foot of the bed, saying, as he placed her in it:

"My dear Mrs. Beverly, let us forbear all questions as to the cause of the disaster until we ascertain its extent." He pressed the lady's hand in friendly sympathy, and returned to the side of the wounded woman. On careful examination he found that she had a slight scalp wound, and that her syncope was caused by shock from concussion, and perhaps a slight compression of the brain.

He had, on hearing from Sampson the character of the injury, brought his case of surgical instruments with him. He lifted his hand in warning and deprecation to Mrs. Beverly, who was rising anxiously, but who, in obedience to his gesture, subsided into her seat again.

When without saying a word that might alarm her about any operation being necessary, he went quickly to work and sewed up the wound, and dressed it. While he was doing this the patient murmured, and spoke as if finishing an interrupted sentence: "of such a cruel repudiation of me, John?"

"What does she say?" anxiously inquired the mother, again rising and approaching the bedside.

"I say," answered the doctor, in a low tone, "what a blessing it would be sometimes if friends and relatives could be kept away from physicians and patients. Sit down, I beg, and be quiet."

Again the anxious mother sank into her seat and controlled herself.

After he had finished dressing the wound, and had made his patient comfortable, he sat for a while quietly beside her. The only sounds heard through the silence came from the convulsive sighs of Mandy, who was crouched upon the floor in a distant corner of the room.

"This won't do at all," muttered the doctor; and he opened his case, took out a vial, and poured a few drops of a colorless liquid into a glass, and then stealthily crossed the room, signed to the woman to open her mouth, and, without more ado, poured the sedative down her throat, saying to himself: "Enough to stop her noise, but not to stupefy her or make her useless, I am sure." And he went back to his seat.

The room was now as still as a tomb. Mandy's convulsive sighs had ceased, and she was moving noiselessly about the room, putting it in order. Eula was slumbering deeply and peacefully. The doctor now rose and signalled the lady and maid to follow him from the room to the adjoining apartment, where they might converse without disturbing the patient.

"Doctor!" exclaimed the impatient mother, without waiting to be addressed, "John ought to be sent for."

"Not to-night, madam, not to-night! There really must not be any disquieting element introduced to-night!" firmly responded the physician. Then, begging his old friend to compose herself, he questioned Mandy as to what had happened.

The woman, with more calmness than she could have commanded without the doctor's drug, told the whole story of the night's events as far as they were known to herself. What passed in the mysterious north end was totally unknown to her.

"Dough I spects," she said, "as the po' baby fell down sta's in the dark and striked her po' deah head."

"Now you see, my dear Mrs. Beverly, even from the little we have heard, how imprudent it would be to send for Mr. Strong to-night. We must wait until our young friend is in condition to receive him," said the doctor.

"Well, at least let the man Sampson be called. He must be able to tell more than anybody else," sighed the poor lady, amid her streaming tears.

"Not to-night, my dear Mrs. Beverly! I beseech you, not to-night. I wish to preserve my patient and all around her in the most perfect quiet. And you, too, dear friend, try to compose yourself. In the morning I will send for the man and question him," concluded the doctor, as he arose and returned to the sick room, followed by the mother and maid. He passed to the bedside of the patient, felt her pulse, stood watching her attentively for a few moments, and then, saying that she was doing very well and would probably sleep until morning if the room were kept quiet, he took his leave, promising to call early the next day.

After the doctor had gone, Mrs. Beverly and Mandy sat down on opposite sides of the bed to watch. Eula slept quietly through the night.

CHAPTER VIII

STRONG'S TERRIBLE TALE.

All things that we ordained festival
Turn from their office black funereal.
— Shakespeare.

CHRISTMAS morning dawned clear and cold. The Christmas sun rose upon a snow-dressed city. Christmas bells were ringing joyously. All without was jubilee! All within was sadness. The sleeper slept on, and the watchers watched.

Dr. Speaks, making his morning call, walked briskly up to the front door of the Strong mansion and ran against Sampson, who was standing there about to raise the knocker, which he let go as soon as he saw the doctor, exclaiming, in an agitated voice:

"Oh, I'm so glad I met you, sir!"

"Mrs. Strong?" anxiously questioned the doctor, alarmed at the man's great excitement.

"No, sir; Mr. Strong!" cried Sampson, trembling.

"Mr. Strong! What of him?"

"Dead in his bed, sir!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the doctor, starting back. "How? When? Are you sure, man?"

"You can see for yourself, sir, if you will be so good as to go with me to his room."

The doctor appalled, hesitated for a few moments, uncertain where to go first, and then said:

"Wait here in the hall a little while. I must see my patient first." While he spoke, the door being opened in response to his knock, they entered. Sampson dropped into an oaken elbow chair, drew a large bandana handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his face, which was streaming with perspiration even on this cold Christmas morning.

Dr. Speaks ran up the stairs to the sick room, where he found the injured woman still sleeping quietly, and Mrs. Beverly drinking a cup of coffee brought her by Mandy. The doctor, after greeting the lady, took the report of the night, looked at his patient, and finding all satisfactory, would have taken his leave and hurried to ascertain the real condition of the man reported to be dead, and about whom he was extremely anxious, but Mrs. Beverly followed him into the passage and detained him by laying her hand upon his shoulder, and whispered:

"Doctor, you can't deceive me! Your face betrays you!"

"Does it, madam? I am sorry. A physician's face should be of marble, for he has much on his mind that should never appear on his face."

"Oh, doctor, don't trifle with a mother's distress!" exclaimed the lady, bursting into a paroxysm of tears, "but tell me, so that I may be prepared for the worst. Is my darling child going to die?"

"Some fifty years hence, perhaps; but not sooner, so far as I know."

"But you look so anxious, so worried!"

"I assure you I am not the least worried on your daughter's account, my dear Mrs. Beverly. Physicians have more patients than one to make them anxious. And more patients' relations," he added, with a sigh, as he bowed and escaped. He hurried down the stairs to the hall, where he found Sampson waiting for him.

"Now show me into Mr. Strong's room, Sampson. This is a terrible thing you tell me, my man! I hope you may be mistaken in what you say! It may be only a fit."

"I wish it was, sir; but his corpse is as cold as ice, and as hard as stone. If he ain't dead, I never saw a dead man! But come and see for yourself, sir! That door," he said, pointing to the communicating door, "which the poor lady unscrewed last night has been screwed up again, and this time the screws are on the other side."

They left the house together, and walked around to the north door, of which Sampson held the key, and which he unlocked. They entered the forbidden quarters. Sampson led the way into a bare passage, up a bare staircase to the first floor, and into a front room, bare of all furniture except a cot-bed, a pine table and a plain chair. A little fire smoldered in the grate. A greater contrast than this to the splendor and luxury of the other side of the house could not be found.

On the cot, covered with a cheap counterpane, lay stretched the form of a man.

Even under the covering it seemed to be that of a corpse. The man approached the bed. The doctor turned down the counterpane and looked upon the face of the dead.

Yes! the dead! The stiff and rigid features! the dropped jaw and sunken eyes!—all assured the beholder that the man before him was a corpse! Nevertheless, Doctor Speaks proceeded to make a more careful examination; at the close of which he covered the body again and sank into a chair beside the body almost overcome by his emotions, for he had loved John Strong from his boyhood. Presently he sighed and said:

"Yes! he is dead! quite dead! Sampson! when did you make this discovery?"

"When I first came in this morning to put coal on the fire, sir," replied the man.

"You must take this note from me to the coroner," said the doctor, drawing his tablets from his pocket and beginning to write.

Meanwhile, Sampson went mechanically about his usual morning duties—raked out the fire and piled coal upon it, for the morning was bitterly cold; made the hearth tidy, and then went to the bedside and carefully covered and tucked in the dead man as he had been accustomed to do for the living invalid. While he was so engaged the doctor spoke:

"Here, Sampson, you will take this to its address. If the coroner should be out you will await his return and give it into his own hands. Do not speak of what has happened to any living creature. We must not have the house beset by a crowd of curious inquirers."

"Oh, no, sir! of course not! I know that, sir," earnestly replied the faithful servant.

"Be as quick as you can. I must wait here for your return, Sampson."

When the man had left the chamber of death, the doctor went again to the bedside of the dead and uncovered and looked with compassion upon the still face. The immobility, but not the peace, of death was there. How did he die? By some subtle, obscure, unsuspected disease? By desperate suicide? Only a post-mortem examination could decide! The doctor covered the face again and walked restlessly about the room, casting his eyes hither and thither, instinctively searching for a clue. Nothing could be less suggestive than the surroundings. Cot-bed, pine table and chair, and a tin match-box on a richly-carved mantlepiece for lighting the splendid gasoliers that adorned either side of the chimney. The floor of costly inlaid wood was without carpet or rug, but perfectly bare! The great contrast between the superb architecture and poor furniture struck him with wonder. At length his wandering eyes fixed upon the pine table which, he saw, had a drawer. It now occurred to him that this drawer might contain something to give him a hint as to the strange fate of John Strong. He went to the table and saw that the drawer had neither lock nor fastening of any sort. He drew it out. Yes! there lay a large box-envelope directed in a bold hand to himself. This seemed to indicate a clue. He seized it, closed the drawer, drew a chair up before the fire, seated himself and leaning back with his feet upon the hobs, drew the packet from the envelope and read the first lines:

"Entrusted to the discretion of my best friend and family physician, Dr. Emanuel Speaks, to be read as soon as he may find it convenient after it shall have fallen into his hands, but acted upon only after my arrest, or after my death, as he may deem most expedient."

Such was the strange superscription. Full of wonder and conjecture, Doctor Speaks first rapidly turned over the pages, when he saw that the "Confession" was rather a journal of a most miserable victim than the self-conviction of a guilty criminal. He turned back to the first page and commenced to read as follows:

"MY CONFESSION

"From My Exile in the North Side,

"September 15th, 1860.

"A catastrophe is inevitable! It may be a question of months! It may be only of hours—therefore, I write this while yet I am free to do so. I stand upon the brink of a precipice. Below is the Abyss of Death. An irresistible power forces me; an awful fascination draws me to leap. For years past I have known, down in the depths of my soul, that I was foredoomed to crime and an ignominious death. I have never breathed the secret to a living soul. I have tried to reason myself out of the presentiment. I have struggled with it alone; and, oh, what a struggle it has been. It has possessed me like a fiend! At one time it seemed exorcised. When I first met my beloved Eulalia, the fiend flew before the angel that looked out from her eyes! All through the delight of our courtship, and the Elysium of our early married life, I laughed at the fiend that had once possessed me, but had fled from before her face as darkest devils are said by the Swedish Seer to fly before the face of an angel of light; I wonder how I could ever have been so morbid, and ascribed my late condition to overstudy—overtaxed brain and nerves. Never was man happier than I was in the first few months of my married life, until one day, after my dear father's death, when it became my duty to look over and burn

certain private family letters, I learned, in reading some among them, the fatal truth that there was madness in our blood!—madness that had appeared and reappeared at long intervals for as many generations as we could count back! Then I understood the nature of the fiend—hereditary madness! Why had not my dear father told me? Why had he permitted me to marry? Nay, why had he ever married? He escaped the curse! How could he dare to think that his offspring might also escape it? He was my father, and a fond father! Yet I must say it was weak and almost criminal in him to allow me, in my ignorance of the family curse, to inflict such an irreparable injury upon the unfortunate gentlewoman who holds the perilous position of being my wife! On discovering the doom that hung over me, I tried to fight off my fears of it. I said that I had already had the attack, and had fortunately conquered it, once for all. I succeeded in persuading myself that I had!

"In the active cares of business, in pleasant social intercourse, and above all in the delightful society of my beloved wife, I forgot the curse and recovered my spirits.

"It was during the dangerous illness of my beloved wife last July that the fell disease overtook me! I felt it approaching! All who were in attendance on my poor wife during that extreme illness knew the intense anxiety I suffered. But they did not suspect the morbid condition of my wretched mind! They could not suspect that I was on the border line between sanity and madness!

"On the terrible fourteenth day of her illness, when she hovered between life and death for twenty-four hours, and we watched her, powerless to help, I passed the border line to the fatal side forever! When, to the surprise of the family and physicians, the beloved invalid passed safely over the dread crisis, the reaction from despair to joyful assurance was too great for the stability of my reason.

"At last the malady took this strange form: that except in her presence, when I could see, hear and touch her; when eye, ear and hand gave evidence of her life and safety, I could not trust myself to believe in either! As I had not slept during her danger, now that she was safe, I slept profoundly, but would often wake with a start; and in the darkness of the room, my mind being confused, would be seized with a fear that she might be dead and buried, and that her convalescence might be only a dream—the dream of an overwrought brain. In this mood I would often rise from my bed in the night and creep upstairs to the large chamber where she had been conveyed to pass her convalescence, and listen at the door, and even steal on tiptoe into her room to assure myself, by the evidence of my own senses, that it was to that apartment she had been carried, and not to St. John's Cemetery.

"When at last I was assured, by repeated experiments and evidence of my own senses, that my adored Eula really was living, did I recover my lost balance of mind? Ah, no! I began to brood and brood and could not help brooding over these questions: How could I have lived? What should I have done if she had died? From these questions evolved others: What if she were yet to die? I realized all too keenly the miserably uncertain tenure by which we hold our best beloved! Ah, me! It was because I had no God in my heart!

"One night—one fatal, accursed night—a ghastly suggestion was projected into my wretched brain: What if I were to kill her? Kill her! My beloved! The heart of my heart! the life of my life! Into what an unimaginable abyss of perdition I should plunge? Kill her? Impossible!

"Impossible! Nay, but it is possible! It is imminent! The great love I bear her—my own consciousness of the eternal misery into which I should fall by such a deed—'the deep damnation of the taking off'—the lurid horror of a sudden plunge—has an infernal fascination for me, giving irresistible force to the diabolical temptation! I struggle against my fiendish foe with all my strength; I guard my dear wife with all my cunning; yet any day, any hour, yes, any moment, I may take the leap, or be hurled over the precipice! For I am mad! mad! And with the crowning curse of knowing my perdition of being unable to escape it! Yet so successfully had I controlled myself up to this day, that no one suspected my condition.

"When my dear wife was recovering from her long illness, there was such good reason why I should not share her chamber that my absence from it caused no comment. And when she was taken to the mountains, and I still insisted that her nurse should share her apartments when I took another room, my conduct was ascribed to overcarefulness for her health and comfort. Ah, Heaven! Little did they know that my absence from her was a necessary precaution for her safety—for her life!

"And still the mania grew upon me, while no one suspected its existence.

"At length, in the crisis of my madness, when she was in imminent danger from me, even in the public rooms, I tore myself away from her, and leaving her in the care of her nurse and friends at the hotel, I returned to Baltimore under the pretext of pressing business. There I meditated some

plan by which I might secure the safety of my wife, without confessing my fatal malady or separating myself entirely from her, the light of my life! I purchased the Montressor House and arranged the interior to suit the miserable circumstances. I then engaged as my personal attendant one Michael Sampson, a gigantic mulatto, fairly educated and without family ties. He had been in my father's service from his childhood, and was then porter in my warehouse. I knew I could confide in his intelligence and fidelity, so I took him entirely into my confidence. He received the trust with the most profound and reverential sympathy and devotion. I instructed him that he must be my shadow, especially that he must never leave me alone one moment, with my wife; that in her presence he must never take his eyes off me for an instant. He must always bear in mind that I might lose self control and be transformed into a wild beast as a flash of lightning; that he must hold himself ready at the slightest sign of danger to spring upon me and overpower me at a second's warning.

"When all was ready, I went to Mount Alto, to bring my wife and her party home. On the evening of our arrival, while I was showing her over the house, closely attended by my unsuspected keeper, I felt a crisis imminent. I made an excuse for leaving her for the whole night, pleading an engagement that could not be broken. That night I spent in the unfurnished portion of the house. I could not sleep. I spent the night in writing to her. I knew that some explanation must be made of the partial separation that I was forced to arrange. It was a hard, heart-breaking letter to write. I could not tell her the truth, for how could she have understood it? I could not bear that she should look upon me, or think of me with fear and horror! I wrote and re-wrote, and tore up letter after letter during the course of that miserable night before I could complete one—not to satisfy me, but the best I could compose to send to her, and then—then—in words wrung like drops of blood from my crushed and bleeding heart, I told her that a fatal necessity which I could not explain, forbade the continuance of our life as husband and wife. I wrote that we might continue to live under the same roof, and must do so to avoid scandal; that we should remain the best and dearest of friends; that we should correspond by letter every day; that we should meet as often as possible; but always in the presence of others, but never alone!—for her dear sake, never alone! Then, lifting up prayers for her safety and happiness, and invoking blessings on her beloved head, I closed my letter.

"Sampson took the letter to her the next morning. What a letter to greet a young and loving wife on the morning after her arrival at home! My poor love was stricken through the heart with sorrow; filled with amazement and perplexity, as well she might be! What could she think, poor child, but that some legal and moral obstacle to our union existed in the shape of another wife? Driven to extremity of conjecture, she formed a theory that in my youth I had made an unhappy marriage; had been separated from my wife; had heard a false report of her death, and under the erroneous impression that I was free to marry again, had married her; and finally, that I had lately heard that my first wife was living, and had seen the necessity of parting with my second. Then what could she, poor soul, do but write to me instantly, and ask if such were the case, and tell me if it were so, no partial separation such as I proposed would purify our lives from sin, or satisfy her conscience—that it must be instant, complete and forever—that she must leave my house at once, and never to return to it, or see or correspond with me again!

"I hastened to answer by assuring her that I never married or thought of marrying, or loved or thought of loving any other woman than herself, and called upon the Lord to witness the truth. This so relieved Eula of her first and worst fears as to render her almost resigned for a time to the situation. I got a little better, and for a while trusted myself to visit her, but never alone, and never at meal times, when the sight of cutlery would rouse the demon in me. Business, in some phase or other, was always my excuse to her mother or uncle whenever they asked me why they so seldom met me at home. But my malady increased. Soon, with horror, I felt that my poor, unconscious wife was in danger from my visits even when no deadly weapon was at hand, for I felt that my strong, sinewy hands were very deadly weapons, and that at any moment, in an excess of frenzy, I might spring upon her and throttle her delicate throat before the swift action of my trained servant could prevent me; or, if I should not quite kill my beloved wife, then I should so frighten and horrify her as to become an object of terror and abhorrence forever after. So I had to deny myself the only comfort I had enjoyed—that of seeing her for a few moments at intervals in the presence of others. I passed most of my time at my counting house. I even took all my meals at restaurants down town, and returned late at night to sleep at my lonely place of exile.

"*December 1st.* No one suspects my misfortune. That there is something very wrong in my relations with my wife seems to have got abroad through the chattering of the servants. This, of course, is inevita-

ble. She has ceased to visit or receive visitors. Now we are never seen together, even at church. I confine myself to my 'Desert Island,' and to my counting house. I write to her daily and hear from her daily. In each of her letters she pierces my bosom by pleading with me to come to her, or to let her come to me and win my whole confidence.

"Now, here's a mystery! Will any philosopher elucidate it? Why do maidens receive love so bashfully and wives make love so pertinaciously? Ay, that's the question! God help me! how I twaddle with a breaking heart and blazing brain! I feel a crisis at hand!

"*December 24th.* Christmas Eve! One year ago I placed the betrothal ring on the finger of my beloved! One year ago! Oh, are you thinking of it, my darling? Are you sitting alone in your room thinking of this very day and hour last year? My God! My God! Why do I not blow out my brains and end it all before I hurt her? Eula! Eula! Do you hear me? Do you hear me? Are you thinking what a beast—Beast? There is no beast so unnatural, so accursed! Even the tiger never has an impulse to slay his mate! One year since I placed the ring upon her finger! Six months since I dared to press her to my heart, or print a husband's kiss upon her lips! Three weeks since I have seen her dear, patient face! Eula! Eula! Eula! I dare not see you! I hear from you every day, and Sampson, who is a truthful reporter, does not conceal from me your waning health! What will be the end of this? I feel—I feel it must come soon! It must! It must!"

The remaining lines of this terrible confession were evidently written at a later hour; after the crisis. They were so wildly scrawled, so terribly blotted, so nearly illegible, that but for what had gone before, the reader could not have made out their meaning.

"It is done! It is done! I have killed my wife! I am glad of it! Glad! It had to be done! Now it is over! She is an angel in heaven! Oh, never! never—not in her bridal veil—did she look so lovely, so alluring, as when she stood before me to-night, her beautiful eyes full of tears, her face aglow with emotion, her hands stretched toward me, imploring me to have pity on us both! No! I will not seek refuge in suicide! I will not die quietly here in my bed! I will arise and go forth, and give myself up to justice! Predestined to commit a crime, predestined to die on a scaffold, I will fulfill my destiny! Why did not Sampson do his duty and go and call the police? Now I will go out and give myself up to the authorities—to meet the ignominy of a public trial and a shameful death! Only such an expiation"—

This was all!

"This most unhappy madman seems to have fallen with the pen in his hand," said Doctor Speaks to himself, as he folded the manuscript.

"So much for presentiments," he mused, as he lighted his pipe. "This poor fellow had a presentiment that he was predestined to commit murder and to die on the scaffold. He has done neither. He only wounded his wife, and he has died in his bed. But uxorcidal mania! He should have taken me in his confidence and put himself under treatment. I knew a man who was afflicted with a like mania who placed himself under treatment and was cured. Poor John! Poor John! Great heaven! how he must have suffered! Alone, too!" sighed the doctor. And he smoked out his pipe.

The doctor arose and walked up and down the floor, impatiently went to the front window, and looked out on the snow-clad city, and saw crowds of handsomely dressed people trooping to the great cathedral, to attend the Christmas service; heard the bells ringing, and sighed:

"I wonder how many others besides this stricken household, in this sinful and sorrowful world, are suffering, instead of enjoying, this festive season? And I wonder what keeps Sampson and the coroner," he added, taking out his watch. "Gone only half an hour! It seems to me nearly half a day since he left!" sighed the doctor, as he stood gazing abstractedly out of the window.

He was interrupted by the entrance of the man for whose arrival he was waiting so impatiently. The giant came in as softly as a pigmy.

"Well, Sampson! Well! The coroner?" demanded the doctor. "Did you give him my note?"

"I saw him, sir. I gave him your note. He told me to say to you that he would come immediately after the morning service at the cathedral was over. He was just going there with his family, sir," replied the man.

The doctor made an impatient gesture as he murmured:

"A couple of hours more to wait. But sit down, Sampson. I wish to have a confidential talk with you."

The man bowed and seated himself.

The doctor had already resumed his own seat, and now he said with impressive solemnity:

"Sampson, I know all about it now. Your master was mad. But as you loved him and his family, never speak of it."

"No, sir! The Lord knows as I have kept the secret this long, I won't blab it now, sir!" replied the man, looking rather surprised that the doctor should know all about it.

"But now, Sampson, I wish you to tell me—and mind, no one else—what happened on that night of your master's death."

"Well, sir, he came in late. I was waiting for him. I did not have to follow him around town like I used to have to follow him about the house. But he looked worse and wilder that night than I ever saw him look before. He walked up and down the floor and dropped into a chair. I asked him if I could do anything for him. He looked at me with a look I shall never forget as long as I live, and said: 'The kindest thing you could do for me, Sampson—the only thing you could do for me I will not ask you to do, for that would be a sin.' 'What is it, sir?' I asked, for I would have committed a sin for him if it hadn't been a very great one, and if it would have done him any good, so 'What is it, sir?' I said. 'You could blow out my brains,' he whispered. 'So could I, but it would be a crime in either of us. So I will neither do it myself, nor ask you to do it. I am possessed of a devil who urges, spurs, lashes, fires me to crime! But I try with all my cunning to keep away from it! Oh! you know, Sampson! Never let me see my angel, Sampson! And now heed me! heed! Do not let me go out to-night! Do not take your eyes off me, lest I should slip out! If I move towards the door, seize and hold me! Knock me on the head if necessary. Stun me! Do you hear!' he cried excitedly. 'Yes, sir,' I told him 'and I will do just as you say. Do not be uneasy, sir! I will not let you hurt yourself or anybody else any more than I would let a child fall into the fire. Trust in me, sir,' I begged him.

"Well, sir, he sat down and began to scribble again. But soon he threw down his pen, jumped up and began to stride up and down the floor, and then stood before me and asked: 'Sampson, do you know what time this is? What day, I mean?' 'Yes, sir, it is Christmas Eve,' I said. 'Yes, Christmas Eve! And the church bells are ringing at St. Mary the Virgin's, for midnight mass. This night one year ago I was the happiest man on the face of the earth! I put the engagement ring on her finger! The Christmas bells rang out just as I settled the little circle on its place, as they are ringing now.' He flung himself down on his chair and dropped his head on his folded arms on the table. I walked away to the window and looked out upon the wintry sky and the snow-covered ground. *It came as quick as a flash of lightning!* I heard a gentle 'John!' and turned. She stood before him with her arms stretched out and looking fit to break your heart! He sprang up, glared, flung himself upon her, and she went down before him! I leaped upon him and tore him off her by main force, and held him against all his violent struggles, until the fit had passed—and I tell you, sir, it took all my strength to do it. The fit left him as weak as a child, and I laid him, crying like a child, on the bed, and went to look at the poor lady. She was quite insensible from a blow she had got, I think, from striking the fender of the hearth. He was scarcely able to move or speak, but he breathed faintly the question: 'Have I killed her?' 'Yes,' I told him, for she lay so still and breathless that I thought he had done that very deed. He said: 'Thank Heaven, it is over at last!' I gave him some ammonia, and then lifted the poor lady and carried her to her own apartments—seeing that she was not dead—and after giving her in Mandy's charge, I went for you, sir. And you know all that happened after that."

"When did you see your master next?" inquired Dr. Speaks.

"When I told you, sir. But I went back to his room after I had done all that I could for the poor lady. I found the room lighted as I had left it. I asked my master if he needed anything, and as he did not answer I thought he was asleep. So I turned off the gas and lay down and went to sleep myself. In the morning, when I went into his room, there was a change made that I had not noticed when I left the night before. The little table was drawn up to the side of the bed, and there were papers scattered over it. I spoke softly to my master, but he did not answer. I thought he was asleep, so I did not speak again, but began to put the room in order. I gathered up the papers and rolled and tied them up as he used to do, and put them in the drawer, and then I noticed the pen was lying on the outside of the bed, which I thought was strange—and then, sir, I found that he was dead! And I think he dropped the pen when he died. Well, sir, I wasn't taken much by surprise, and that's a fact, sir. So, though I was considerably upset at first, sir, I do think this is the best thing that could have happened to poor, dear Marster John, sir. So I just straightened the bed neat and made the room tidy, and went and told you, sir."

"You acted with much discretion, Sampson. And now I beg you to continue to be as prudent and as reticent in reference to your late master's misfortune as you have hitherto been. The coroner will probably order an autopsy, and that will determine whether there will be an inquest or not. If an inquest should be necessary you will, of course, be compelled to tell all you know,

but not otherwise. You understand?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I know! I understand! And unless I should be ordered to give my evidence before the coroner's inquest, no one shall ever know from me that my poor, dear master was out of his mind!"

"That is right, Sampson. And now, while we wait for the coroner, I must go and break this sorrowful news to Mrs. Beverly. Do you stay here until my return," said the doctor, as he drew on his overcoat, took his hat and left the chamber of death. He went downstairs, out of the side door and around to the front entrance, where he knocked and was admitted. He went upstairs slowly, being in no hurry to tell his dismal news. He went first to the chamber of the injured woman.

He found Eula awake, but very weak and dull. The room was darkened, for, as Mrs. Beverly explained, she seemed sensitive to the light, frowning and shutting her eyes when exposed to it. The doctor, however, had the window curtain nearest the head of her bed put aside, so that the light fell on the wounded side without annoying her, while he examined and dressed the wound. Then he gave her some light nourishment that had been prepared, and left her to repose attended by Mandy, while he signalled Mrs. Beverly to accompany him from the room.

"How is she now, doctor?" anxiously inquired the mother, as soon as she had closed the door behind her.

"Doing very well. Has a little irritative fever, but not so much as might have been expected. Sit down, Mrs. Beverly, and compose yourself. I have something very serious to tell you. No! not about your daughter. I have kept nothing back about her," he hastened to add, seeing the rising alarm of the lady. "It is about her husband.

And then he told her all.

Mrs. Beverly listened with clasped hands and wide eyes, but stood the shock with more firmness than might have been expected.

"Was it—was it?"— she shrank from uttering the word that was on her mind. But the doctor understood and answered as if she had spoken it.

"Oh, no! I hope not! I think not. There is nothing as yet to lead to such a supposition. But only a post-mortem examination can show the cause of death."

"Oh! What will Eula do? What will Eula do?" wailed the mother, wringing her hands.

"She must know nothing about it for many days to come. The terms on which she has been forced to live with—or rather, I should say, without her husband—will make concealment easy, and his absence a matter of course. There must be an inquest to-day; but it will be held in the other side of the house, and in no way disturb our patient. I would advise you not to speak of what has occurred as long as silence can be observed; especially keep the nurse in ignorance of it, lest her want of self-control should disturb her mistress," concluded the doctor, as he arose and left the room.

Mrs. Beverly remained, walking slowly up and down the room until she had regained some measure of self-control, and then she re-entered the sick-room and resumed her seat beside her daughter's bed.

Dr. Speaks went slowly back to the chamber of death. As he opened the door he saw Sampson standing transfixed by the side of the cot, staring down upon the covered form lying upon it.

"What is the matter, my man?" the doctor inquired, approaching.

"Oh, doctor! See here, sir!" exclaimed Sampson, in great excitement.

"See! What?" demanded the physician.

"Did you move it, sir?"

"Move! What? What do you mean, Sampson?"

"The corpse, sir! the corpse! Did you move it, sir?"

The doctor stared, seeming to think that the man was demented.

"Did you move the corpse, sir? Oh, sir, did you move it?"

"No, of course not! What is the matter with you, man? Why do you ask?"

"Oh, sir! if you didn't move it, it has moved its own self! Oh, this is awful, sir! It is worse than a ghost! A thousand times worse!" cried Sampson, shuddering with all the superstition of his race.

The doctor turned down the spread and looked. It was true. The body had moved! Dr. Speaks gazed with almost as much awe as the poor mulatto had exhibited. But his tone was quiet as he inquired:

"When did you notice this?"

"'Bout five minutes ago, sir: I hadn't looked at the body since I first came back from the coroner's, and after you went out I did not go near it, neither, sir. I was standing at the window watching the people coming out of church when I thought I heard a sound near the cot, and I turned around and saw—that!" said the man with a shudder.

"That" was the changed position of the body.

While they spoke the doctor had not been idle. Eagerly but quietly he felt the pulse, and listened to the heart and finally drew from his pocket a case, and, selecting a

small bottle of ammonia and a hypodermic syringe, he filled the latter and then, baring the arm, he injected a small quantity under the skin. The result justified his new born hope! A red blush appeared around the puncture. Sampson meanwhile stared at the doctor in fear and wonder, as if he suspected him of some unchristian if not unlawful necromancy!

"My man," said the doctor, putting up his instrument, "did you ever hear of anyone being buried alive?"

"Good Lord deliver us! No, sir!" cried Sampson.

"Yet such things have happened, and such a thing might have happened to your master!"

"Good Lord Almighty, sir!" solemnly responded Sampson.

At that moment a loud knock at the door proclaimed the arrival of the coroner.

Sampson ran down to admit him and in a few moments returned with that officer. Dr. Speaks went to meet him. The day's salutations were quickly exchanged between the two gentlemen, and then:

"What is wrong here? In what capacity am I required? Your note simply demanded my presence without any explanation," said Dr. Wright, dropping into a chair that Sampson had placed for him.

"It is as well I did not commit myself by an explanation, doctor, for, though I summoned you in your official capacity as coroner, I shall beg to detain you here in your professional character. Please walk this way."

Dr. Wright, full of interest, accompanied his brother physician to the bedside of the "dead-or-alive" body. There Dr. Speaks, exhibiting the subject, gave a brief account of the case.

"Catalepsy!" decided Dr. Wright, without an instant's hesitation. "Catalepsy. The shock threw him into the fit. And this very fit may so revolutionize his nervous system as to, under proper treatment, effect a perfect cure. At any rate, you now know the condition of his nervous system and can persuade him to place himself under your treatment with a promise of a cure! Once excite that hope in him and you will probably succeed."

While the physicians consulted over the strange case, Sampson, unnoticed, watched and listened with eager and anxious attention, and gained enough information to quiet the superstitious fear and horror that had possessed him at the thought of the corpse moving. When called upon for his services he showed himself alert, active and intelligent in the discharge of all the duties required of him. Dr. Wright dispatched him with a note to his young assistant at his office. In due time the messenger returned with the student, who brought the necessary medicine and a medical electric battery.

The two physicians gave up their holiday for that day, and postponed all other business to attend to John Strong.

In the course of the afternoon Dr. Speaks found an opportunity to go to the other side of the house, and, sending for Mrs. Beverly, imparted to that astonished woman the amazing intelligence of John Strong's revival from his death-like trance, and the probability of his final recovery. He renewed his caution and received her repeated promise that she would not give occasion for unseemly gossip by speaking of the strange events of the last twenty-four hours.

It was late in the afternoon and the day was drawing to a close, when the patient drew a long, deep breath, and slowly opened his eyes.

They fell upon the anxious and sympathetic face of Dr. Speaks, bending over him. He looked bewildered for a moment, passed his hand feebly over his forehead, and, glancing up again at his friend, who seemed to be waiting for his first words, said:

"I must give myself up." Then he attempted to rise, but sank back exhausted, muttering: "Oh! weak! weak! I cannot. They must come and take me here!"

"How are you, John?" kindly inquired the doctor, taking his hand and bending nearer to him.

"Oh, weak! so weak! dying, I think!—as I don't deserve to die—peaceably—here—in my bed," faintly faltered the failing man.

The doctor poured a little cordial from a bottle that stood on a stand beside the bed, into a small glass, and placed it to his lips. The patient swallowed the stimulant obediently, almost automatically, and said:

"Send for the police."

"Why, what do you want with the police?" quietly inquired the doctor.

John Strong stared at him, and replied:

"To take me into custody! To arrest me! You know! You must know what I have done!" he muttered, rising feebly on his elbow and gazing into the doctor's face.

"What do you think you have done, John?" soothingly inquired the doctor.

"Killed my wife!" cried the wretched man, with a wail that might have come from a lost spirit.

"Killed your wife! What nonsense! You have done nothing of the sort, John!" said Dr. Speaks, cheerily.

"Not!"—gasped the man, starting and staring.

"No!"

"Not"—

"No, I say! You have been ill, John. Your wife is all right (or will be soon)," he mentally added.

"Then it was a dream? nightmare? delirium?" inquired the poor man, passing his hand feebly over his brow.

"Something of that sort," replied the doctor, evasively.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" breathed the man, in a deep, fervent tone of delight and gratitude that seemed to thrill his whole being. Presently he inquired:

"How long, doctor? Days? Weeks? How long?"

"Oh, not long. But now you must stop talking; take some nourishment, and be quiet."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God?" earnestly repeated the man, tightly clasping his hands.

The doctor himself prepared the food, while the patient lay with closed eyes and clasped hands, ejaculating from time to time:

"Thank God! Oh, my God, I thank thee! Oh, what a great deliverance! Oh, what a rescue! Oh, my whole life's devotion—my whole life's devotion cannot be offering enough to my God for this great deliverance!"

And in his fervent gratitude the stalwart man was as humble and obedient as any little child; taking everything the doctor offered him and doing everything the doctor ordered him to do.

After eating he fell into a deep sleep. Then Dr. Wright, who had remained sitting in a distant part of the room so as not to disturb the reviving patient by sight of a strange face, came to the side of the bed, gazed down upon the sleeping man for a few moments, and then said:

"I should not wonder if this should effect a complete cure, if, as in the Scripture, the evil spirit (homicidal mania), tore him only in departing from him. I am going now, but call upon me if you should want me."

Dr. Speaks thanked his brother physician, who then departed.

Dr. Speaks, leaving his patient in the charge of Sampson, with sundry charges to keep the room quiet and at an even temperature, went to the other side of the house to see his other patient.

He found Eula sitting up in bed, much recovered, and attended by the faithful Mandy. Mrs. Beverly was temporarily absent from the chamber.

The first words that Eula spoke happily led to the conversation he wished to pursue with her.

"Dr. Speaks, have you seen anything of my husband, lately?"

"I have just come from him, my dear," he answered.

"How is he? Oh, how is he?"

"I left him sleeping. He has been ill."

"Ill? I was not told? Let me go to him! Mandy, bring my wrapper and help me to get up. Excuse me, doctor."

"Stop, my dear young lady. He is asleep, as I said. He must not be disturbed. When he wakes he will be better able to come to see you than you are to go to him," said Dr. Speaks, laying his detaining hand with fatherly tenderness on the shoulder of the young creature whom he had attended from her infancy. And she obeyed him as if he had been a father as well as physician.

"But will he come to me, doctor? Will he? Oh, will he?" she pleaded, pathetically, gazing imploringly into the doctor's face.

"Yes, my dear child, he will, indeed. He is anxious—eager to come to you—now!"

"Now!" she echoed, as she scrutinized the doctor's face with all her acuteness. "Now? Dr. Speaks, dear friend, I wonder how much you know—how much I might venture to touch upon, without"—she seemed to hesitate for a word, and then, in a tone so low as to be almost inaudible, continued—"indiscretion—disloyalty to"—here she stopped, blushing, silent, and confused.

The doctor took her hand with the tenderness of a father and the sympathy of a physician, and answered, gently:

"I know everything, my dear child—everything; much more than you do, and I come to you now to bring you news of hope and happiness for all your future married life."

"Oh bless you! bless you! bless you!" ardently exclaimed Eula, pressing his kindly hand to her lips.

"But, my child, you must believe in me, confide in me and follow my counsel."

"Oh, I will! I will! I will! Bless you! bless you!" she exclaimed, in so much excitement that the doctor thought a sedative was required before he could go on with the subject he wished to pursue. He gave her a dose from his pocket case, and then, after waiting a few moments, he inquired how long Mrs. Beverly might be absent.

Eula told him that her mother would not return before nine o'clock, as she had gone to fetch her uncle.

The doctor felt pleased to have an uninterrupted conversation with his patient; so

when he thought her prepared for it, he quietly asked her:

"Do you know how you come to get that bad blow on your head?"

"Yes, doctor. I went into the other side of the house to see my husband. I was very weak and very much agitated. As you know all, you know why. The room was large and murky, with only one light, and that dazzled my eyes as I crossed the floor. John was sitting at the table and I could not see his face. His back was towards me. I spoke to him and he started up, and as I rushed at him like an eager, thoughtless child, doctor, I missed my foothold and fell; struck my head, saw flashes of light, and knew no more until I woke up here in this bed."

"And that is all about it, my dear?" inquired the doctor, looking intently into her candid countenance and reading there only truth.

"Yes, all, doctor, so far as I am concerned; but poor John! He must have seen me fall. How anxious he must be!"

"He was quite overwhelmed and distressed, my dear."

"Has he been in to see me? I asked mamma, but she would not let me talk, nor would she answer any of my questions."

"She was right. No, John has not been in to see you. We could not let him come to-day. He shall come to-morrow."

"Doctor, since you know everything, as you say you do, are you free to tell me why my dear husband estranged himself from me?" she asked, with pathetic earnestness.

"This much, my dear child! That John Strong's self-banishment from you was the heaviest cross he ever had to bear, and it was borne from the deepest and most disinterested love that man ever cherished for woman."

"Oh! what was it? What was the cause? Was there—was there any"—she hesitated, dropped her voice, and sighed forth the words, "other person—who—had"—

"No! no! of course not! Hush! hush! I will tell you. Last September John was attacked with a nervous malady and became the subject of violent paroxysms, during which he was frightful to behold. He was so sensitive about his condition that he thought incurable, that he would not consult a physician, and was so afraid of shocking you, or frightening you to death, or otherwise injuring you during these awful attacks, that whenever he felt them coming on he would hurry away."

"Oh!" cried Eula, wringing her hands, "I have so often seen that terrible look come into his face and seen the man Sampson hurry to his side!"

"Yes, my child, he kept the mulatto constantly beside him to control him during these paroxysms."

"And no one suspected his trouble! Not even I, his wife!"

"No, my dear, he guarded his secret too well! More the pity for him! If he had known it we might have cured him sooner! But do not look so distressed, my dear, it is all over now!"

"Doctor, how at last did you discover his condition?"

"Through Sampson. A crisis was at hand. It came with a more violent paroxysm than ever, which ended in a fit so deadly that Sampson came to me this morning and took me to his master's bedside. I saw the necessity of calling in Dr. Wright, and he has been with me and we have both been at the bedside of the patient all day. He has now recovered and has fallen into a natural and refreshing sleep. To-morrow he will be able to come to you, my dear, never to distress you again."

"He distress me? John distress me? Oh, doctor! It was I who distressed him! In my ignorance of his real condition, oh, how I persecuted him! How I tortured and tormented him with my persistence! Poor John! Bearing his terrible affliction alone! And driven almost mad by my persistence in trying to penetrate it!" she sighed, wringing her hands in a nervous tremor.

"Your persistence in trying to solve the problem of his trouble and to restore your marital relations was an evidence and expression of your affection and constancy. While it was much annoyance under such circumstances, it was much more of a comfort to him."

"Do you think so, sir? Oh! do you really think so?"

"I am quite sure of it, my dear," said the doctor, rising to take his leave.

He had told the young wife all that he had deemed necessary to explain the strange conduct of her husband, but no more. Not for the world would he have told her that her husband's paroxysms took the terrible form of homicidal mania! Scarcely for his life would he have had her suspect that the frenzy had threatened herself.

After leaving Eula he went back to his other patient, and found him sleeping calmly; gave some directions for the night, and then, leaving him in the care of Sampson, he departed from the house.

Very early the next morning Dr. Speaks made his appearance at the bedside of John Strong. He saw that his patient was sleeping quietly, and heard from Sampson that he had so slept through the night.

"That is as it should be. Now, my good

fellow, you may go and get your breakfast, of which you must stand much in need, while I sit by your master," said the doctor, as he took a chair and seated himself to wait patiently for the awakening of which he saw some signs. He had not long to wait. Presently John Strong calmly opened his eyes and recognized his physician.

"Well, my young friend, how are you this morning?" cheerfully inquired the doctor.

"Clothed—in my right mind, doctor, to use a Bible phrase, for a demoniac from whom a devil has been cast out," replied John Strong, with so much of his old healthy, happy, natural tone and manner that the doctor promptly responded:

"Yes, so you are, John. Give me your hand! I congratulate you with all my heart and soul, thank God!"

"Amen!" fervently added Strong. "And how is my dear wife?"

"She is all right. But before you see her we must have some confidential talk together."

John Strong looked uneasily, inquiringly, at his physician.

"You have no cause at all for anxiety. Attend calmly to my little narrative," said the doctor.

And then he commenced and told his friend and patient all that had happened within his own personal experience in the last two days. Of how he had been called to attend Mrs. Strong, who was suffering from an accidental fall—

"Accidental!" exclaimed John Strong staring.

"Hush, man, don't interrupt me! Yes, I said accidental! She says accidental, and she ought to know."

"Oh, doctor, does she believe what she says?" groaned Strong.

"On my soul, she believes it. She is pure truth itself," replied the doctor, and he then went on with his narrative. Of how he had been met at the door by Sampson, who thought that he had found his master dead in his bed; of how he had dispatched Sampson for Dr. Wright; and of how he had searched the room for a clue to the cause of his death when he found and read the "Confession."

"Ah! Ah!" exclaimed the poor hearer, at this point of the narrative.

"And it is well that I did discover and read it; but it would have been better if you had taken me into your confidence when you first felt the approach of this morbid condition. I could have cured you and have saved you and your wife from months of needless suffering," said the doctor. And then he resumed his story, and told how, while Sampson watched the body, he, Sampson, saw signs of life in the supposed dead man; and that further investigation had shown that he, Strong, was suffering from a fit of catalepsy which so strongly simulates death.

"Now this catalepsy," added the doctor, in conclusion, "was evidently caused by the shock you received, or rather gave yourself, when you thought you had mortally wounded your wife; and just as evidently it was the crisis that will cure your nervous disorder. It has completely revolutionized your nervous system, and has made a new man of you. You need not fear to give yourself to your dear wife. And, moreover, she knows nothing of the worst of your disorder. I have told her a part of the case; that you were subject to paroxysms so violent that you feared they might frighten her and cause her to have a horror of you. I also told her that you were now permanently cured; and you are. But for all that, if you should at any time doubt your cure, come and confide in me. I will be responsible for your safety and that of your dear wife."

"My own dear Eula! When may I see her?"

"You may breakfast with her this morning, if you will."

"If I will! Oh, doctor!"

"But hark ye, John! Send Sampson away!"

"Send Sampson away! My faithful Sampson!"

"Yes, send him away. His presence will not be wholesome for you. It will remind you of the most unhappy period of your life, which you ought to forget."

"Yes, you are right, doctor! But to send him away! It would seem so heartless and ungrateful!"

"True! Stay. How much did you pay him as your body guard?"

"Twelve hundred dollars a year."

"Give him fifteen hundred or two thousand to sit in your office and answer questions. And you! Pack up and take your wife to South America for a year. Total change of scene and surroundings for a year."

"So I will, doctor!" cried John Strong, eagerly, "if you will go with us! Oh, do make us happy and consent. Do! You have talked of giving up your practice for years, but you cannot do it while you stay in this city. Your old patients love you too well. But come and go with us to South America. You are right about South America. Europe is now 'played out' with old tourists like us! Come, doctor! And if it were not offensive to offer, I should say, name your own salary."

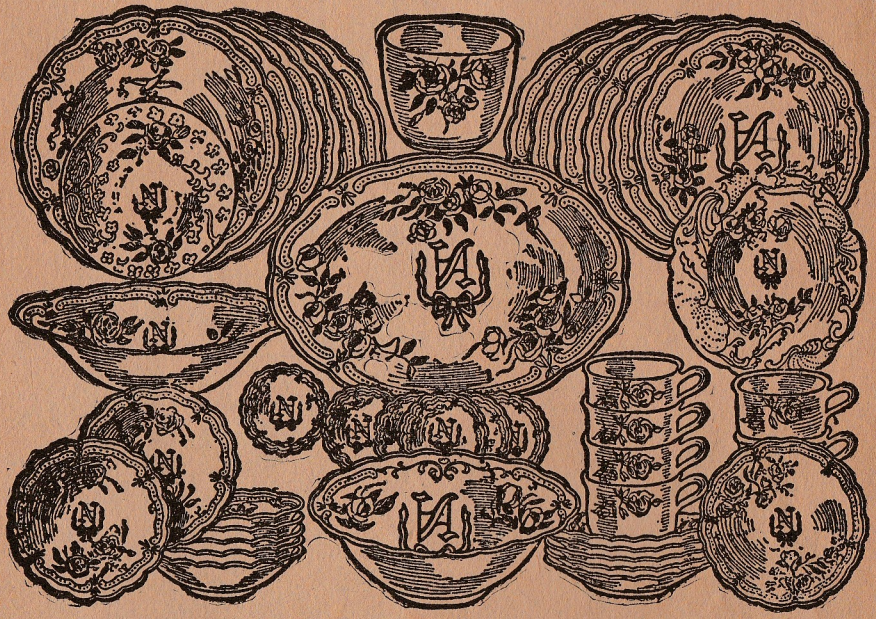
"Nonsense, John. I think I will go with you, and as for the rest let us talk business, not sentiment. If I should conclude to go with you, partly for my own sake, taking a long needed rest, and partly for yours, to look after your health of mind and body, well, under such circumstances, I shall not demand an exorbitant salary nor refuse a reasonable one. Here is Sampson! Now rise and dress to join your wife. I will go before you and announce your coming and see how she is getting on this morning." With these words the good physician left the room.

He found Eula up and dressed, waiting for his morning call. When he told her that her husband was so much better, and that he would join her at breakfast, her joy and gratitude knew no bounds. She insisted that her friend should remain and join them at the table.

"If it would interrupt a tete-a-tete, my dear child, I would not do it, but as your mother will be one of the party, I accept your kind invitation gladly," he said.

Just as he spoke, John Strong, who had lost no time in making his toilet, entered the room. And neither the presence of Dr. Speaks nor of Mrs. Beverly prevented Eula from springing up with a cry of rapture and throwing herself into her husband's arms; nor her husband from straining her to his breast with kisses, tears and fondest words of love and joy.

[THE END.]



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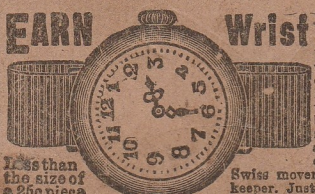

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